

"To the friends in the Underground Resistance Movement in France, without whom Dawn Escape would have been impossible."

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TO A EUROPEAN REVOLTER

The battle rages with many a loud alarm and frequent advance and retreat.

The infidel triumphs, or supposes he triumphs.

The prison, scaffold, garrote, handcuffs, iron necklace and lead-balls do their work.

The named and unnamed heroes pass to other spheres.

The great speakers and writers are exiled, they lie sick in distant lands

... But for all this Liberty has not gone out of the place nor the infidel entered into full possession.

DAWN ESCAPE

I

ON THE EVE

"LES ALLEMANDS ENVAHISSENT les Pays-Bas!" "Hitler invades Belgium and Holland!" shouted the news-boys of Paris—I jumped up from my sunny seat in the Luxembourg gardens, and ran to buy a copy. So that was that. The end of the "drôle de guerre," the "phoney" war, that had been going on for eight months; the beginning of grim reality for the people of France.

It was difficult to believe that mass slaughter and destruction had been let loose and were already raging only a few hundred miles away from this quiet garden, where students sat reading, and children played with flotillas of toy boats on the pond. The early summer had set the Paris gardens on fire, and the pink hawthorn glowed, the candles of the chestnuts burnt white and red, and the laburnums trailed yellow clouds of glory over the grey balustrades of the terraces. People went quietly about their business. The life in the cafes continued. That evening the Flore, haunt of journalists, painters and poets, was fuller than ever; every one was discussing whether it would be possible for Hitler to get to Paris. "Not before six months at least," said a well known foreign correspondent, "unless something very queer happens." This was not very reassuring to the Parisians, but to me it meant enough time to take the examination at the end of the University course, and to finish off the work I was doing for the Spanish Refugee Children's Committee. After that I would go home to England, I supposed.

But alas! for my calculations. "Something very queer" did happen, after all. The invasion of the Netherlands was followed very rapidly by surrender and the "treachery," as every Frenchman disgustedly expressed it, of the King of the Belgians. The German advance swept on, St. Quentin was taken, and towns nearer and nearer Paris were bombed. May passed, and June came, with richer, greener gardens, hotter sunshine, and wonderful clear warm nights. It was impossible, I thought, loitering along the quays by

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the Seine, and watching the silhouette of Notre-Dame through the changing pattern of the plane trees' branches, that anything so magically beautiful could possibly be bombed, or that the hand of an invader should ever desecrate anything so sacred and serene! And yet . . . with the rumbling of the guns, and those distant flashes in the sky, one could not feel too sure.

At the end of May, the German advance was turned away from Paris and the capital heaved a sigh of relief at the respite; but it was obvious that the enemy armies would turn south sooner or later, and in the meantime reports came in of the undeniable efficiency of the Germans, and edition after edition was rushed off the press telling of slaughter on a scale unheard of in history. Anxiety spread and the atmosphere grew tense.

Policemen all over the city stood at street corners with rifles, ready for an invasion of parachutists, which nobody expected but every one feared. Every passer-by was stopped and asked for papers, and if you were a foreigner without your "carte d'identité" on you, heaven help you!

The sirens sounded air-raid alerts three or four times, but no raids occurred. Only one early afternoon was there any actual bombing, when German planes flew very high over the outskirts of Paris and dropped bombs on Issy les Moulineaux, and two or three small villages outside.

Early in June came the débâcle at Dunkirk, and the news that the German advance was now being directed southwards, that the French Army was breaking up, and in retreat all along the line, and that the Germans might be expected at the gates of Paris any day. People began to disappear, leaving word that they were sorry but they had not time to say good-bye. I personally did not board a southbound train, as the Sorbonne course was still carrying on, and I wanted to take the exam; I wishfully thought, too, that some miracle might still happen to prevent the fall of Paris. However, it soon became clear that the miracle was not happening, the advance was not being stemmed; a state of mass neurosis set in.

Then rumours began to circulate that the Government were leaving, had left, were going to stay—nobody knew anything, but everyone hoped that this signal of defeat would not be given. However, when I saw the office of the *Journa Officiel*, the mouthpiece of the Government, being

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packed up, and sent off in sealed vans, it was pretty clear that the decision to leave had been taken.

It was the word "Go" for all who had means to get away; cars began to leave, and a steady flow of traffic poured out along the roads leading south; people started off on bicycles, and on foot.

A factory worker told me that he had received orders to start off next day walking south to Pau, with the rest of the personnel. The machines of the works had been dismantled and sent in advance. From another friend I heard that the prisons had been emptied, and the prisoners sent in bands to another place in the south.

Notices appeared on the walls, and in the Metro carriages, adjuring the population to keep calm, and ordering the employees of public services to remain at their posts. Mlle. R—— complained bitterly, "The authorities have gone off, and we have been told to stay. Nothing is organised, and nobody knows to whom we are responsible." Another teacher said to me, "Why should they order us to stay here while the Germans invade us? I *won't* become Boché."

The guns rumbled nearer and nearer. Panic, most contagious of diseases, spread rapidly and even the most stalwart caught the epidemic. My friend Sylvia, who had decided to stay in Paris, changed her mind on June 11th and accepted the offer of the loan of a car. Would I drive the family out? I said, yes, with some misgivings, hearing, by this time, rumours of the machine-gunnings of roads and panic among the refugees. The next day we heard that the car was not available, and Sylvia, by this time thoroughly alarmed at the stories about the Germans razing towns and villages to the ground in their onward sweep, decided to take the train.

From my diary, Thursday, June 13th: "Up at 5 a.m. and off to Gare d'Austerlitz with Sylvia and her two small children, old Mme. Delin and her sister, trying to catch last train out of Paris. Unspeakable crush in Metro—everybody seems to have had the same bright idea. At Metro Austerlitz the platform one solid wedge of humanity; quite impossible to get out of the compartment, let alone reach the booking-office. As for catching a train! . . .! Went on to next Metro station, and sat in café watching the exodus: the same procession that has been going on since Monday, people heading south on foot, bicycles, in cars, pushing prams, wheel-

barrows, voitures à bras, etc., with all their worldly goods; whole farms coming through with carts loaded with household goods, furniture, pots and pans, farm implements, chickens, rabbits, calves and children all mixed up.

"Home, and had council of war. Sylvia thought I should try and get away in any case. Went up to Issy to borrow bicycle from Jeanne M——. Saw result of Paris's one bombardment; a large crater in main street of Issy, and fort and crèche (fancy building a crèche beside a fort!) badly damaged. Jeanne had disappeared like everybody else. Got concierge to lend me a man's bicycle, an antediluvian old thing without brakes, and rode back home. Met soldiers in retreat on road, looking very weary and haggard and dishevelled. Something disastrous obviously happening.

"Went to see Georges and Marie S—— in rue de Seine. Their car all packed up ready to leave. They cheered when they saw the bike, and said 'You're lucky. All you have to do is to hop on and ride out at one end of Paris when the Germans come in the other. You'll certainly hear them coming!'

"Bicycled round Paris a bit. Silent, empty streets. A few straggling tail-enders of exodus still passing through. Queer effect of completely deserted Place de la Concorde, Avenue de l'Opera, etc.

"Dead city. Cannon booming to the north, and to the N.W. enormous pillars of smoke rising from the sky, where retreating French must have set oil dumps on fire. Torrents of black rain. Got soaked through, and arrived home looking like a chimney sweep.

"Went out later (impossible to sit still indoors to-day) at night, noise of fighting nearer, sky most exciting, red glows and flashes to the north. Packed bag, and pumped up bicycle tyres. To bed with good resolution of getting out first thing to-morrow morning."

Having written up my diary, I went to sleep, and dreamt I was at a class on Diderot at the Sorbonne, when a horde of Nazis in brown shirts swept in, planted the professor against the wall, and started playing darts with him as a human target. I woke up in a fright.

The sun was shining into the room, a sign that it was round about 7 a.m. The rumbling and booming of the guns had stopped, and there was an ominous silence. I pulled on some clothes, and dragging myself downstairs, stumbled

into the old concierge, her hair still in "bigoudis" (curlers), eyes goggling, and mouth agape.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," she moaned, "it's no good your trying to go! They came in at four this morning. They are all over Paris. We are caught like rats in a trap!" I told her not to worry, but to stay indoors and keep calm, she would be all right. "It's not for me, Mademoiselle, they say the Germans do not mind the French so much, but for you who are English, it will be terrible!"

"Why didn't you wake me, nom d'une pipe!" I grunted under my breath, still half asleep. I strapped my case on to the carrier of the bicycle and pushed off, in the forlorn hope of getting out without meeting any of the new arrivals, by side streets.

It was one of those radiant Paris mornings that promise a roasting hot day. The streets still seemed deserted, and at first I could see no sign of the invaders. On the Pont de l'Alma were two policemen looking like dummies that had lost their stuffing. I was struck by the fact that they no longer had the rifles with which all the Parisian police had been equipped since the first parachute alarm, when everybody was on the lookout for Germans disguised as priests with machine-guns and folding bicycles under their robes.

The policemen had never used their rifles, but they had been very officious in asking for papers, and I felt a secret pleasure in seeing their humiliation.

I asked these two if it were really true about the German entry, or merely another "bobard." One shrugged his shoulders helplessly, while the other said "As you see," and pointed down the avenue, where several motor-bicycles were coming down towards us. There was a rumble of engines, which became a roar, and the motor-cyclists flashed by at a tremendous pace, but giving time to identify the grey helmets and olive-grey uniforms of the Reichswehr.

Well, that's that, I thought. I didn't like the look of them at all. They would certainly be guarding all the possible exits of Paris by now; but it was perhaps still worth trying to get away, and I threaded my way through the quiet streets on the left bank, to my friend's house in the rue de Seine. The place was deserted. Even the concierge had departed, and an unhappy cat, obviously forgotten by its owners in the last-minute rush of departure, sat mewing on the doorstep.

In the "quartier Latin" I hoped still to see friends, but all our usual cafés, Dupont, Flore, the Dôme, were closed. Only in the small back streets were there signs of life. Clusters of workmen and concierges were excitedly discussing the arrival of the invaders:

"They seem quite well-disciplined," said one woman. "Maybe," retorted an old man, "but I heard an officer shouting from his car, 'vous serez tous *geschlagen*,' and I was in the Rhine occupation, and I know German, and that means *beaten up*."

I asked the proprietor of a little café what he thought about the chances of escaping at the eleventh hour. He shook his head.

"No hope. But you're better off here than on the roads. People are dying there by scores; they are charging 10 francs for a glass of water, there is bombing and machine-gunning, c'est la pagaille! You are lucky to have stayed here."

As I rode back past the Chambre des Députés, I witnessed a melancholy scene: a squad of fat French gendarmes engaged in hauling down the tricolour flag from the building. And by the time I reached my friend's house near the Champ de Mars from the Eiffel Tower was floating an unfamiliar flag, red, white and black, which, through field-glasses, turned out to be the Swastika.

The Delin family were in a terrible state of nerves, excepting Pierre, aged six, who was elated by all the excitement, and begged to be taken to look at "les boches." He wanted to see Hitler, or at least some German officers. We did not have to move out of the house for his wishes to be granted partially. For opposite the dining-room window was a Government building which half an hour later had the honour of a visit from the German High Command.

The Nazis certainly started their work of occupying the city and taking over the public buildings exceedingly promptly. All over Paris there must have been groups of officers taking over premises, and requisitioning offices such as these.

At 12.30 a car arrived at the house, and several officers, one fat and pompous and covered in braid and decorations, got out, and tried the door, which naturally was locked. They looked around and saw a half-open window, through which they decided to enter the building; one of them rang our door-bell, and asked for a ladder, which the concierge, with a

sour look, and a very bad grace, not daring to disobey, produced from the cellar, and propped up against the wall.

We watched the scene from our window, and Pierre's delight knew no bounds when the fat officer started climbing up the ladder and getting in through the window of the office. His peaked cap went in, then his shoulders with the epaulettes, but his middle simply wouldn't, and he stuck in an undignified position till the other officer climbed up and gave him a firm push from behind. He then disappeared into the building for half an hour, while the others waited and got very bored, passing the time by studying the old French war posters on the wall. "Il veille." . . . "L'ennemi vous guette! The enemy is watching you," etc. At one point they retired into the "urinoir" at the corner, to Pierre's huge delight—"Regarde, maman, les officiers allemands font pipi, eux aussi!!"

"I'm going to watch the German March Past at the Arc de Triomphe," I said, after lunch.

"Moi aussi!" piped Pierre.

"You most certainly are not, Pierre, and it's crazy of Frida," added Mme. Delin, thinking no doubt of atrocity stories of the last war, and having visions of baby-eating Germans carrying off Pierre or trampling him under foot.

So I went off alone, and passed the afternoon at the Etoile, at the most astonishing spectacle I ever hope to see. The German Army parade appeared to have been rehearsed for weeks, stage-managed and produced by a master hand, and was, I should think, the most successful of all Hitler's manifold pieces of stagecraft.

A military band was installed at one side of the Arc de Triomphe, consisting of soldiers in full equipment, thumping drums and blowing trumpets, tubas and cornets as if their lives depended on it. To this martial and festive accompaniment, regiment after regiment rode and marched past the generals who stood taking the salute by the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. (Later, the Germans made a point of laying wreaths on the Tomb, an irony fully appreciated by the Parisians.)

The procession was in full swing when I arrived. One could see it stretching for miles, like a monstrous grey-green serpent, writhing along the Champs Elysées, an endless stream of men, hundreds of thousands of them, it seemed, on foot, on bicycles, in cars, carts, tanks, field-kitchens, every kind

of conveyance. I could not have imagined such multitudes of men. And the cavalry! Who would have thought there were so many horses in the world, let alone in the German Army!

Mixed feelings surged in my soul. . . . horror and disgusted indignation at the sight of such an abuse of manhood and money on such an object; unwilling admiration and fascination at the vastness and impressiveness of the whole thing. Fear—almost panic—at the show of power and organisation; and shame that our own leaders had so ignorantly—or was it wilfully—misled us as to the strength of the military machine of which this was a fair specimen.

What a machine! How perfectly co-ordinated, down to the humblest soldier, whose head turned like an automaton (one almost expected to hear the click!) when passing the general. Over and over again, in talking to the Germans later, I got the same impression; that they were, even in speech and thought, parts of the machine, answering automatically in machine-language. Woe betide if the machine should go out of gear, or the man at the lever lose control!

The Place de l'Etoile was, by the evening, packed with people watching the display. The Parisians, who all the morning had stayed behind closed doors, or like the Delins had peeped from their windows, could not in the end resist coming out, and watching in fascinated horror and stupefaction. They asked themselves what it all meant, and what it foreshadowed. This might, of which they were being shown a specimen through the parade, through the aeroplanes which zoomed continuously overhead and sometimes came roaring down, almost touching the roofs, through the high-powered army cars which rushed about the streets of the city—to what end was it going to be directed?

Though many Parisians watched the orderly behaviour of the German soldiers with relief that day, there were many who wondered how long this behaviour would last, and not many who believed it was out of sheer love of the French that the Nazis were desisting from the methods with which they had occupied Prague and Vienna and Warsaw. French nerves were distinctly jumpy, to say the least, as they went to bed that night, wondering what the future held in store for them, under the rule of the uninvited visitors.

II

A WEEK LATER

After some days our nerves began to settle down, and we no longer leapt out of our skins when one of the enormous Luftwaffe planes roared over the house, nor rushed to the window when a battalion of soldiers came singing round the corner.

All the same, it was difficult to get used to the new aspect of Paris, with swastikas flying everywhere, and German notices and signposts at all the corners, or to the sight of these unfamiliar creatures and activities, which seemed to be superimposed on the familiar background. The cavalry procession, which continued for days down the Champs Elysées—by this time looking and smelling more like the Augean Stables than the Elysian Fields!—the squads of field-grey soldiers tramping the streets to the hammered beat of their Nazi war-songs, the officers' cars rushing at tremendous speed down the big boulevards, regardless of how many Parisians were knocked down on the way—in a week, all these had become every-day sights, but none the less quite unreal.

It still seemed fantastic that the Hotel Continental, so recently the Ministry of Propaganda, and the Hotel Ritz, haunt of the British diplomatic corps, were full of Germans, and that we pedestrians of Paris were not allowed to pass the pavements outside them, but had to make a wide detour across the Concorde. We could not get used to the drill of the German sentries outside the building in the Place de l'Opera and elsewhere, the changing guard with the goose-step, the clicking of heels and clattering of rifles, and saluting as any officer passed. It was all so utterly unlike Paris; the population used to assemble opposite the Nazi headquarters, and watch the outlandish ceremonies in fascinated silence for hours on end.

Life began to resume its course. People reopened offices and shops (this under orders from the Germans), a few booksellers unlocked their stalls on the quays, newspapers began to reappear. The first to come out was *Le Matin*, whose director had stayed in Paris for the German entry: someone swore they had seen him on the threshold of his office that morning, smiling and welcoming, in his Sunday-best clothes!

Paris-Soir was the next. There, it seems the lift-man was a "fifth-columnist," who had been working all along for the Nazis, and had managed to stay in the offices when the staff left, holding the key of the premises, which he duly presented to the newcomers! Later, I heard that he had been appointed general director, and was writing the editorials. However that may be, it was quite obvious that the leading articles of the paper were written by a foreign hand; I have never read such execrable French!

A friend who worked after a brief period of unemployment as newsboy in *Paris-Soir*, told me that the whole staff was German, and that the few Frenchmen in the administration were very soon sacked. The man who engaged the "colporteurs" (newsboys) was thrown out, after a scene with a German officer, and all the boys went on strike, led by my friend. For a whole day no issue was delivered, to the great joy of Marc, the colporteur, who estimated the loss to the firm at millions of francs. Next day "blacklegs" were found to work for the Germans; Marc was not much upset. "There wasn't much money in the job," he said. "Very few people really care to buy the rag—not even to wrap their boots in—it isn't tough enough." People preferred to get their news from the foreign radio, preferably London, but even if necessary Vichy, which at that time presented some hopes in the eyes of the Parisians.

There was a crop of strange newspapers which sprang up in the absence of the former publications, some of which flourished for a period and then faded away: *Les Dernières Nouvelles de Paris*, *La France au Travail*, *Les Nouveaux Temps*; while *Aujourd'hui* and *l'Oeuvre* started later, and led a precarious existence, constantly changing editors, in attempts to effect a compromise between the Paris public and the Nazi censor.

Paris resumed its pre-invasion complexion. Cafés reopened and were greatly appreciated by the German soldiers, who used to sit in serried ranks on the terraces along the boulevards. I once went into a café and found it full of German sailors, who had got hold of a piano and were thumping out the Lambeth Walk. I plucked up courage to say, "I thought it was forbidden in Germany." "So it is—but why worry? It's a good tune!"

The big shops were opened and business went merrily ahead, the Germans buying up in Lafayette and the Louvre

shops, all the silk stockings and lipsticks and beauty accessories that their women had had to go without for so long. A few patriotic small shopkeepers held back their stocks as far as they could, saying "We would rather lose the cash than let our goods go to les boches."

It must be admitted that the Parisians were surprised and rather thankful at the lack of mass-pillaging and looting. After the true stories of savagery and plunder in other occupied countries, they had foreseen large-scale disorders, and they were relieved when the Germans came into the shops and politely asked for goods, for which they duly paid. The French little realised that they were being robbed in another more cold-blooded official manner, as the money printed by the Nazis specifically for the occupation was, in fact, worth practically nothing, and that they were parting with valuable stocks and getting pieces of useless paper in exchange.

It could not be denied that the soldiers were disciplined and "correct." It was obviously Hitler's policy to make a good impression of discipline and order in France. The posters which went up just after the entry of the Wehrmacht "*Ayez confiance dans le soldat allemand*," with its touching illustration of a German soldier with a small child in his arms, showed this. Incidentally, the Germans sent round cars with milk, and soup kitchens to feed children in the poorer districts.

Their charity was not universal: one half-starved child with enormous pathetic dark eyes, was brought to the food kitchen by its father—a Jew. The child was refused milk and sent away empty.

The requisitioning of houses and offices and private flats was carried out in an equally orderly but ruthless way. No excuse carried weight if you happened to be a foreigner with an empty apartment in the town. I myself was asked by at least five different friends to occupy their rooms while they were away, so as to keep the Nazis out, and everybody with American or Swiss or other "neutral" friends used them to obtain the Consul's stamp on the door.

About a fortnight after the German entry, on a lovely July day, I made the tour of the neutral Embassies, where every foreigner flew for advice and protection, on behalf of myself and of refugee friends. In the U.S.A. Embassy there was a long queue of women, frightened and depressed. "Heaven protect me from being interned with any of these!"

I thought, at the sight of these woeful weeping women. Hitler's will, unfortunately, was to prove more effective than Heaven's protection in this case. The Americans were doing good work, calming the British subjects, and they promised to send through messages to our families.

Next, to the Swiss Legation, to send a letter through the Red Cross at Geneva. Nothing doing here, as I was not a Swiss subject.

On to the Mexican Legation, to inquire about the fate of Spanish friends, who were afraid of being handed over to Franco by the German authorities; the Mexicans promised they were doing their best to emigrate the cases in danger—"I wish you would emigrate me!" I thought.

The last diplomatic visit on the list was the Soviet Embassy, to ask about the return of a friend, a Rumanian, of Bessarabia, to Russia.

There was little hope of getting to the door here, as the pavement and roadway of the rue de Grenelle were completely blocked by a six-deep queue of people, all wanting the same thing: Esthonians, Lithuanians, Bessarabians were all standing waiting in the hope of a word that would enable them to get to their countries, now under Soviet control. An employee of the Embassy opened the door and announced that only Baltic States' subjects would be considered to-day. Bessarabians should come back next month!

Completely done in by the tour of the Embassies, I dropped in to the D— Café, which had by this time reopened, and was almost its former self. L—, the Bulgarian painter, and S—, the surrealist poet, were of course deep in a discussion on the meaning of art. F—, American journalist, tight as usual, was giving his views on the world situation.

An Italian, known locally as Benito, came up and talked about his new review, that was going to "stab the Germans in the back." As we sat blathering, I noticed for the first time the notice on the doors, "Verboten . . . Wehrmacht." Benito explained that it had gone up that day on the cafés where the owner was Jewish, or Left-wing; and that that explained the good business being done by this café that day.

A little later two German officers came in and, not noticing the poster, sat down heavily on the terrace. The waiter, regretful and embarrassed, informed them in French that he had orders not to serve them; not understanding, and furious,

they took this as an insult directed at themselves; another waiter, seeing a storm blowing up, ran for the proprietor, who arrived and explained that this was a non-aryan café and not for them. With a snort of disgust, the two Germans removed themselves to the café across the road, which was far less animated and pleasant, leaving the old habitués in possession.

"There's something to be said for being untouchable, after all," said the American, voicing the general pleasure at seeing them go.

It was getting late when I left the café. The civilian population had to be in at 10 p.m. and it was 9.40. Hell! My tyre was flat.

I had to run most of the way to the Etoile, and with all my efforts, could not make it in less than twenty minutes. It was three minutes to as I passed the Place de la Concorde, and 10 had not struck as I turned into my street. Two policemen, obviously delighted at making a catch, stopped me at the corner. Where was I going? What were my papers? A foreigner? English? They firmly marched me away from the flat, which lay two minutes away, off to the police station, round the corner, where a group of dejected-looking individuals who had missed the last Metro were preparing to spend the night.

The "poste de police" was dimly lit and altogether most unprepossessing. At one end, a number of policemen were sitting at a table playing belotte. A stove with a kettle on it gave out an intolerable heat. Along one wall was a narrow bench and a number of bicycles. We had to pass the night sitting on the bench and leaning on the bicycles, snatching what sleep we could between the coming and going of the police, who brought in drunkards. These were locked into a small cell at the end of the room, where they stayed all night, singing, whining, and asking for drinks.

One of the policemen, while refusing to pander to the drunks, gave us a cup of coffee in the small hours; otherwise the hospitality was not grandiose, and I was thankful to be let out at 7 the next morning, with a warning to be home in good time in future.

III.

SUSPENSE

Strangely enough, we British women were left in comparative peace by the Germans for nearly half a year. The men were not so lucky.

At the beginning of July all the English men of military age were rounded up. My friend H—— was taken by the Gestapo one hot afternoon; he unluckily answered the door to them, and although they had come looking for someone else, they took him off just as he was, in tennis shirt and flannels, to Fresnes prison. Katharine, his wife, could get no news of him for over two weeks, and nearly went mad with anxiety. Later she heard that he was in St. Denis barracks, where he has been ever since, living in appallingly bad conditions.

The taking of the men marked a step in the anti-British campaign of the Germans; it also marked a turning-point in the feelings of the French. Up to then there had been a slightly hostile attitude towards us, and resentment at the memory of Dunkirk and the débâcle; but the determination of England to go on fighting had surprised most Frenchmen. They were also beginning to see the meaning of the Armistice terms, the surrender of all Republican principles by Pétain, the hopeless position of the Government now installed at Vichy, and the results of the Nazi occupation.

Apart from the Wehrmacht on the spot, whole battalions of troops on leave were being sent to Paris as a holiday and reward for their services. They arrived in charabancs, standing upright and jammed together, were whirled along to the Eiffel Tower (which they were told was built by a German, and up which they clanked in their heavy boots, audible a mile off!) taken round the sights, and encouraged to spend their money in buying up the stocks.

They were like a plague of locusts; everything disappeared after their visits—luxury goods, cosmetics, materials, shoes, stockings, food. In the cake-shops I have seen German soldiers clear the boards: it must have been a long time since they had seen cream buns and confectionery such as they found in Paris.

A soldier would buy a 30-franc pastry, suitable for a family of ten, and eat it up on the spot; sometimes they would

put a slab of butter between two blocks of chocolate, and eat the over-rich sandwich with an enjoyment which horrified the French; they would gulp down liqueurs and aperitifs as if they were drinking beer, an unpardonable excess in Parisian eyes.

In the markets, the vegetables, eggs and butter were taken, loaded on to vans and driven off to the occupation centres. There were incidents in the Halles every day, and for a week no potatoes were seen in Paris—a reprisal for the shooting of a German soldier who was removing a lorry-load of fruit.

All this brought home to the French the real meaning of occupation and the anti-British feeling was short-lived, in spite of the efforts of the authorities to foster it by articles in the press reviving the "traditional hatred" between our two countries (Joan of Arc and Napoleon hit the headlines continually), while one read daily dissertations on the racial resemblances of the French and the Germans.

Gruesome posters were displayed everywhere: Churchill's face in the middle of a huge octopus about to strangle France; a British officer planted among a group of starving French women and children, with a scene of destruction and desolation around: "C'est l'Anglais qui vous a fait cela!" I saw this plastered on every pillar of the arcades of the rue de Rivoli. The next day almost every one was torn or destroyed. Notices announcing severe penalties for "mutilation" did not prevent this happening all over the town, nor the chalking on walls everywhere: Vive l'Angleterre, A bas les Nazis, Vive Thorez; nor scrawls of Vendu (sold) on advertisements of *l'Oeuvre*, previously a Left-wing paper, and *Aujourd'hui*; nor stickyback labels on doors boasting de Gaulle.

The news of the organisation of the Free French Forces was well received and followed with interest and envious admiration. People listened-in regularly to the British news, and a friend of mine had to pay up 4,000 francs after a German officer heard her through the window tuning-in to London.

We women were left alone for the moment. We were under the shadow of imprisonment, but there was nothing to do but to wait and try to live as one best could in the meantime. I lived very cheaply, occupying successively the flat of one absent friend after another, so as to prevent re-

quisitioning of the premises by the German authorities; first in the lovely room of a Mexican, full of masks and rugs and furniture from Mexico, and with a rare collection of Spanish and South American gramophone records; then in an American sculptress's studio in Montparnasse; then in the apartment of an Italian refugee. The U.S.A. Embassy gave British subjects a pittance, which I supplemented with the takings from a Guignol—Punch and Judy show—which I got permission to give in the Mairie garden at Neuilly every week. The dolls were of papier-mâché, made from glue and chalk and copies of *Paris Soir*, given me by Marc, the unsuccessful newsboy. I modelled and painted them, and dressed them in all kinds of costumes. The most successful puppets were the Hitler and the Mussolini, which I never dared produce in public.

I found a collaborator for the show at the "Déjeuner des Artistes," the mid-day meal given at Montmartre for out-of-work actors and music-hall artists. An elderly actor volunteered to help, and we rigged up a collapsible theatre out of plywood and scarlet canvas, which we trundled out to Neuilly every Sunday. We wrote topical sketches for the puppets, and rehearsed a new one each week. Unfortunately my co-operator was not marionette-minded, and his gestures were more suitable to the Comédie Française than to a Guignol; the puppets would go shooting up into the air, or disappear completely as he laid his hand on his heart in an impassioned gesture, forgetting that he wasn't on the stage himself! Nonetheless, we had a faithful audience of small children, who turned up every Sunday to cheer and encourage Guignol, and brought me in some 100 francs a time.

Most of my friends were back in Paris by the beginning of August, and I used to bicycle round seeing them. As was common just then, my "velo" was stolen one day, when I left it outside the house. Feeling very upset and ashamed, I went out to Issy to break the news to J—. She was living in a back room, while the rest of her flat was occupied by six German officers. When I asked her how they behaved, "If only I could complain!" she lamented. "Outwardly they are only too 'correct.' But what is going on behind the façade of good behaviour is worse than open atrocities. We'd prefer straightforward looting to this system of requisitioning everything officially."

"We'd rather have out-and-out murder in the streets

than these disappearances of friends, whom they take to question and whom you don't see again. It's strange that they haven't touched you English women," she added.

"Don't worry, our turn will come!" I assured her. The first indication that our turn was coming was the official order given by the Nazi authorities, to keep us under their control, that we must sign-on at our local police station.

This was a mild measure but irksome, and gave us the feeling that we were well and truly under the German thumb. If we forgot or failed to sign, a policeman would come panting along to find us the next day, and we would be interviewed by the chief, who would explain at great length that we must be more careful, as the Germans would punish *him* for our negligence.

Early in September, I found that my father's friend, M. G—, director of the Rodin Museum, was back, and went to see him at his office. He was, as everybody was, astonished to see an English girl at large in Paris. He himself had had no trouble, thanks to the presence of mind of his assistant, who had prevented the Germans taking over the museum as offices when they entered Paris. They had decided to occupy it, but the porter, in the nick of time, had rushed down to the cellars, where the bronzes were being kept for safety, and had displayed some of the statues in the entrance, proving that the museum was in use. Monsieur G— was very nervous lest the Germans should become so short of metal for war purposes that they would decide to requisition the statues, as they had done in the case of various French towns. "There is nothing we can do against them if they decide to rob us," he said. "Might is right, you know . . ."

One day I went to visit Mlle. S—, the school teacher, and directress of a school in the centre of the town. She was furious at the curriculum imposed on her by the Germans. "They want me to hold German classes," she said. "I would much prefer to have English ones. If they insist, I shall ask you to take them." It was with the greatest difficulty that I persuaded her that both she and I would get into hot water if she was found employing a British subject, especially in the teaching of German.

October passed, and still we were unmolested, though news from the British internees at the St. Denis barracks was not reassuring, and reminded us always that we were under

the shadow of the prison ourselves. Many people of my acquaintance, well-known anti-Nazis, were in gaol; and others in constant fear of arrest.

Professor Langevin, the greatest physicist in France, had been taken and his treatment aroused great indignation among all circles of Parisians. Others, such as people who had worked on committees helping the Spanish refugees, were left, and even allowed to carry on their work for a while, but most "progressives" found themselves out of work, and were faced with the choice of unemployment without dole, or transfer to jobs in Germany.

To earn some money I kept the Guignol going, and on Sundays still managed to attract an audience, although it was getting somewhat cold for out-of-door shows; and on windy days the little canvas theatre tended to fly off the ground, and small children had to be bribed to stand beside it and hold it down. It was obviously not a winter occupation, and I began looking for an indoor site and hawking it round to schools. But when they heard my English accent, teachers and directors were chary: they had strict orders to regard us as enemy aliens, and could hardly offer an English woman employment, whatever their sympathies.

We foreigners had not the right to work, officially, but I managed to give some English lessons, and found no lack of would-be pupils, in spite (or perhaps because) of the fact that Berlitz and other language schools had stopped all English classes, under German orders. Of course, there was a big demand for German lessons, as very few of the Nazis spoke French, and very few French spoke German. Interpreting and other administrative jobs mostly fell to "White" Russians and other foreigners.

In November the Sorbonne was due to reopen, and I signed on as a student again. It was interesting to see how education was faring under the new régime: in schools, compulsory gym and games for boys, domestic classes for girls. Non-aryan teachers had been warned that their employment would soon cease; in the meantime they had to wear brassards with "juif" on them. The standard history and other text books of a progressive or republican nature were withdrawn and replaced by a list chosen by a pro-German educationalist.

In the Sorbonne itself there were many changes. The "Recteur's" chair was occupied by three different men in

two months; many of the most brilliant professors were dismissed for racial reasons, notwithstanding vigorous protests from their colleagues. The spirit in the University was excellent; teachers and students alike had a healthy and hearty hatred of German methods.

The students were the most active militants against the Boches, and there were constant mêlées in the Boul-Mich, and rowdy student gatherings, followed by riots and arrests. On November 11th the students turned out in a body to march to the Arc de Triomphe and lay a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. The Germans made no objection at first; and the whole thing might have passed off without complaint had it not been for two things, both put down by the French later as provocation. On passing the "Jeune France" (Young Fascists' organisation) headquarters in the Champs Elysées, there was an interchange of words between its members and the students; then a German car drove at great speed down the Avenue, scattering the procession. There were shouts of "Assassins," "Saligauds," and less printable names, and general disorder; an appearance from nowhere of German troops, panic among the students and onlookers, shots fired, people knocked down, arrests, and dispersal of the demonstration.

The result was a notice on the door of the Sorbonne next day announcing that the University was closed till further notice by order of the German authorities, who could "no longer tolerate such proceedings." All Parisian students were ordered to sign every day, like ourselves, the British; there was a grand jam in the station for the next few days, and one heard the police heartily cursing the "Frigolins" for inflicting these invading crowds on their already crowded offices. Non-Parisian students had orders to leave the city; bunches of dejected students stood about the quadrangle complaining that their careers were wrecked: "I have saved up for my course for years. I can't just go home and live on nothing till they choose to reopen."—"We've lost a year already through the war, now they want to take away still more of our precious time."—"They want to turn us into Nazis, with 'à bas l'Intelligence' as a motto, just what they did in Czechoslovakia and Spain." A lot of unacademic language echoed through the venerable precincts of the University that morning.

When I got home that same day, the concierge rushed

out: "Mademoiselle! The Boches are after you! They have been up to your room looking for a secret wireless set. They asked if you had a radio."

"Well, they must have been disappointed." They certainly had been, and done their job with German thoroughness, forcing the door, and turning the place upside down in their futile search. The only thing they had not done thoroughly was the tidying up.

"They are beginning to get very jumpy," I thought, as I cleared up the chaos—extracting books from bedclothes, and sorting the scarves and stockings and marionettes and paintboxes that lay in heaps on the floor. "If they really are on the tracks of spies, and trouble to visit such an innocuous person as me in the process, it doesn't look very hopeful for our future." It would save them a great many visits and a lot of trouble if they had us all locked up! There was just the chance that this might not occur to them. It remained to be seen.

IV.

ARREST AND INTERNMENT

On December 5th, as we were sitting down to breakfast, the bell rang. I went to the door, and found a French policeman waiting there with a slip of paper in his hand marked with my name and address.

"You are Mlle. Stewart?" he asked. For a wild moment I thought of telling him that no such person existed, and that he might as well go back to the Commissariat. But he had already guessed my nationality, and went on: "I have orders to conduct you to the Mairie, for questioning. You had better take provisions and clothes for two days—and a blanket." I realised, with a sinking feeling, that the moment had arrived, and went up to pack, determined at least to have with me in the concentration camp my favourite belongings and my warmest clothes.

The policeman grumbled when he saw the size of the case I was taking, foreseeing that he would have to carry it to the Mairie for me. "But I know what 'two days' means," I protested. "And even if they do confiscate some things, it's worth taking a chance of being warm and having some books to read." I said au revoir tenderly to the Delin family,

promising poor little Pierre, who was in tears, that I should soon be back, and went off with my escort loaded like a very unwilling beast of burden. On the way we met another "agent de police" and another captive—a French woman married to an Englishman; she made her guide wait by her luggage in the street while she went into a church for half an hour to pray.

I quote from my diary: "Arrived at Mairie of 7e, where crowds of women of all sorts and ages were sitting about waiting, surrounded by masses of Parisian police and German soldiers.

"Nazis examined papers and passports. After two hours there, were packed into Black Marias, and driven to Gare de l'Est. Looked like a Mothers' Union outing. Waited in train in stations from 12 till 5 p.m. Then moved out in easterly direction, but with no idea to where. Germany? Poland? East Prussia? In carriage with two English girls, one old lady of 85, who had to have drops put in her eyes every ten minutes (do they really think she's a spy?) one fat barman, two French women, widows of Englishmen. All very indignant and upset.

"December 6th. After travelling all night found we were still in France. German sentries parading corridor of train quite affable, but absolutely refused to tell us our destination. Gave us spotty purple sausage out of tins. Train slowed down at Belfort, but instead of going east to Germany, turned south and went on to Besançon. Stopped at B. station, where several battalions of German soldiers waiting on platform. Were marshalled into crocodile and escorted by troops through outskirts of town to local barracks."

Here the diary must be expanded, though it would need the pen of Tolstoy or the pencil of Goya to depict the scenes that followed our entry into Caserne Vauban.

The background of our life as prisoners, which started at this point, was the barracks, three big blocks of buildings, with offices and outhouses, standing round a cinder-covered courtyard. High walls festooned with barbed wire, and sentries with helmets and rifles guarding the gates, gave us the impression that it would be no easy matter to escape, that we were well and truly in the clutches of Hitler.

Our miserable procession filed in, while army carts followed, and luggage was unloaded and strewn about on the ground in the middle of the yard. To the left was a group of

khaki-coloured soldiers, whom we recognised as allies—they were some of the French prisoners left behind to work for us in the camp. On the right, a number of German officers stood, smiling patronisingly at the haul made by their authorities.

It certainly was a most astonishing collection that had been gathered up in the German devotion to duty. There were some 300 people of all types, ages and nationalities. We all stood there in the gloomy courtyard, with a pale sun gleaming down on us, and looked around with sinking hearts.

Suddenly, to my astonishment, I heard a very Oxford accent drawling out orders (could this be Lord Haw-Haw brought by the Germans to interpret for us? On the contrary, it turned out to be the voice of one of two English soldiers, kept here for our benefit. They didn't stay long in the camp, to our great sorrow. A month or two later we saw them marched off between sentries, presumably to Germany, though why or where we never knew). "Will women of 15 to 30 please stand in a group on the right? Women of 30 to 60 on the left. People of over 60 in the middle." Nobody seemed to understand English; old people shuffled across to the right, some others sat down; the rest stood still. The order was repeated, but with no better result. We stood for a bit, trying to hear what the Oxonian was telling us about finding a room in the building, but failing absolutely to catch a word through the hubbub we decided to act for ourselves. We moved forward towards the door of the building on the right and there was a general surge into the building. A woman with red hair and a pugnacious jaw appointed herself bodyguard to the Tommy who looked in danger of being knocked over and planted herself on the stairs, brandishing an umbrella at anyone who tried to rush the sentry. "Six at a time," she announced. And by dint of shuffling and elbowing up, I got into a group of six well up in the queue for rooms. Eventually our six got up the stairs, only to find that all the smaller rooms had gone and that only vast dormitories were left.

I planted my bag down in the corner of an enormous room and looked round to know the worst. Women were pouring in and occupying the remaining places. The room was high and long, with greyish walls, covered with suspicious marks. "Bugs," said the girl next me, and burst into tears.

There were some thirty beds down the sides of the room, low and wooden with straw palliasses, which looked none too clean. The floor was swimming with muddy water. Smoke was pouring into the middle of the room from a stove which a harassed French soldier was doing his best to light. I asked him whether we had been expected for a long time. "Pensez-vous!" he answered. "We were only told of your arrival yesterday. Two days ago, two thousand prisoners of war left the camp, and since then we have been working all day and night to clear it up for you!" He went on to tell us about his own experiences in the camp; he had been taken at the Maginot Line in June and brought with 22,000 others to these barracks, where they had been herded on top of one another, sleeping on stone floors and out in the courtyard for several weeks, with practically no food, and very little water. They were guarded by young Nazi soldiers, who had behaved unspeakably to them. Some of the prisoners had been shot while escaping, which was almost better than living under such conditions. "And now they have been sent to Germany," said my friend, "and all you will see of them is what they have left in the yard; and if you want anything to eat out of, plates, or knives and forks, you had better go and get them quick."

I went downstairs, and saw "what they had left"—a series of muck-heaps in the yard, littered with old military coats, helmets, rusty tins, utensils of all sorts, mixed up with torn books, rubbish, and rags. The new inhabitants of the camp, realising the necessity for equipping their future abode, had turned to and were rummaging in all the dumps for pots and pans and knives and forks. Old ladies in fur coats, children, nuns in variegated robes, were feverishly scavenging, and having found the necessary utensils, were scrubbing away at the rusty bottoms and ingrained filth with handfuls of gravel and dirty water. The wind had risen and flying clouds of dust swirled about the yard; women clung to their hats, the nuns' robes flew out like banners, and old men's hats were blown off and went bowling along the ground. It began to snow, and all but the most courageous retreated into the buildings, clutching what booty they had been able to collect. I felt proud of my achievement—a knife, a fork, and a fine big can, which I carried upstairs, only to find it had a huge hole in its side.

We were given some soup. I swallowed mine with

difficulty and, tired out, turned into bed.

My first night in captivity is engraved on my memory as one of the most disagreeable I have ever passed. I have never hated anything as bitterly as I hated all womankind that night. All round me, all night long, my room-mates were talking in high-pitched voices, weeping, lamenting, laughing hysterically, restlessly getting up and wandering about the room. I foresaw an endless series of nights like this, and of equally noisy days without peace or privacy, for the duration of the war.

Mercifully however rescue came in the morning, when what was left of me was salvaged by two British subjects whom I had talked to on the journey, and who invited me to share with them a small room which they had found in another building.

One of the girls was a Nigerian called Ronke, a perfectly beautiful negro girl, ebony-skinned, with flashing teeth and eyes, and with the movements and grace of a wild animal. The other came from Australia and was as beautiful as Ronke but a complete contrast, with fair hair plaited round her head, blue eyes and a rose-petal complexion. She was a physiologist and had courageously brought Darwin's *Origin of Species* into the camp, along with several advanced modern scientific treatises, of which the Nazis would certainly have strongly disapproved.

I thankfully packed up my belongings, and transferred them to the little room in "Building B," where the three of us lived for several weeks without any major crisis. Owing to the small size of the room we managed to cope with the problem of keeping more or less clean and civilised; it was a haven from the noise and squalor of the rest of the barracks, where life was a continual fight against bugs and dirt.

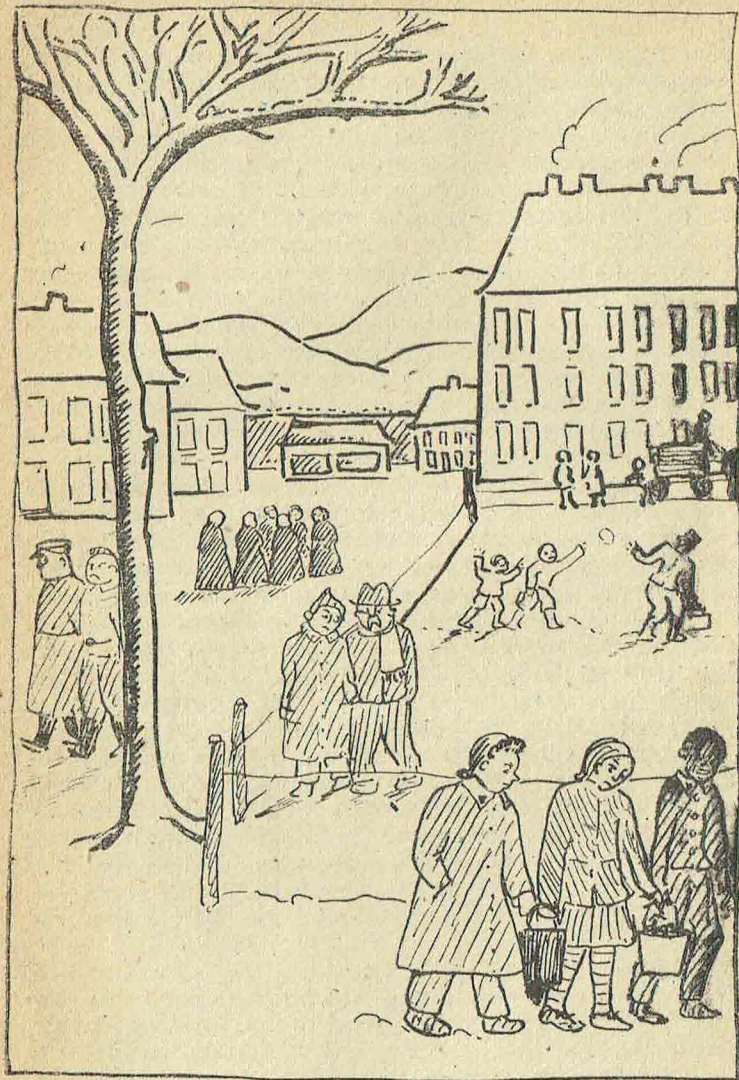
After a day or two, we were able to look round and take in our surroundings and the set-up of the camp. The administration was entirely German; we came in contact with them chiefly through the "Deutsche Schwester." The "Sisters" were women brought from Germany to look after our welfare. They were all clad in white cuffs and caps and grey uniforms. Each Schwester had a section for which she was responsible. Most were ardent Nazis and tried to organise us on the lines of the Third Reich, appointing a "Führerin" (even in our room of three!), making us drill, and generally behave ourselves like Hitler Jugend. Schwester Ruth, our

particular sister, was a moon-faced girl with flat, fair hair. She was a real martinet, but although we broke all her rules and pulled her leg unmercifully, she liked us and took us out shopping on special occasions. Unfortunately for us, these expeditions into the town (where we used to have an exciting time, whispering behind her back to the very sympathetic shop-people of Besançon), were forbidden after one afternoon when an internee escaped.

At the head of the camp was the Kommandant, who looked rather like a bear in uniform, a rough but cheerful German from the Black Forest. He did his best to run the camp without ill-treating us, and on the whole was not disliked. When he did get annoyed, he would thump his desk and shout like Hitler himself. He was not a member of the Nazi party, nor were many of the other officers in the administration, luckily for us. The German soldiers themselves were second-line troops, not very young or enthusiastic, and we were able to talk to them freely.

We had a glorious opportunity of learning different languages in the camp; we practised German on the sentries, and French on the prisoners of war with whom we often had the chance of talking. Every sort of French accent and dialect was to be heard among the soldiers—there were men from the Midi, Marseillais, Bourguignais with wonderful rolling r's, Bretons, Basques, Parisians. While the German soldiers had the light work, the French did all the dirty jobs of the camp, the stables, the latrines and the clearing up of the courtyard. Many of them were specialised carpenters and plumbers, and those who had office experience worked in the bureaux. Some of them slept among their tools in the workshops, in the greatest discomfort, but on the whole they were cheerful enough. They never tired of telling us about their war experiences, and of how they were let down by their leaders. "If only we had another chance!" they would say. "When once we get the opportunity, the Boches won't be here long!"

We could even practise Spanish in the camp, as there were among the prisoners three Spanish soldiers. They were Republican refugees, highly skilled cobblers, who were kept on to mend our shoes. Miguel and Juan were brothers who had fled from Badajoz and joined the Spanish Government army in Madrid. They had been separated and had not seen each other again till they met by chance in the shoe-mend-



The Barracks Yard, January, 1941.

ing shed of the French concentration camp of Argelès. They had been in eleven different camps, and finally sent with a work company to build fortifications on the hottest spot of the Western front in the spring of 1940. There they had been cut off and captured, and now they were in their twelfth camp. They were very small and sensitive, with the charm and dignity of Spanish peasants, and they took their misfortunes very philosophically, making me feel we were very poor stuff when we complained of our comparatively easy lot.

As for other languages, we had among the internees an endless variety and choice. There were Italians, Russians, Turks, Poles, Scandinavians—every possible nationality—who had been interned in this camp for British subjects merely because they happened to have been born in some part of the British Empire, where their parents had made a stop on the way to their own country. There were women of all countries who had married Englishmen and whether they had husbands interned at St. Denis, or living in London, or whether they had been widowed or divorced for years, made no difference. Many were the women who complained that they had long been separated from their spouses and hated the British; they were considered by the Nazis just as “undesirable” as ourselves, the 100 per cent. English minority.

Apart from the different nationalities, there was an infinite variety of kinds and classes of people; there were “Society” girls, who arrived in leopard-skin coats, Polish peasants, French Canadian nuns of eighteen different orders, in robes of all colours, blue, brown, grey, black and white, governesses and nurses from French families, women dentists and teachers, students and charwomen.

The male population of the camp presented an almost equally heterogeneous appearance. There were some 300 men at first, most of them elderly (the younger Englishmen had already all been interned at St. Denis), and seemingly harmless; the majority of them were jockeys, gnome-like little men who had stayed on near their beloved horses at Chantilly and Longchamp, and had no interest in life but racing; there were bargees, keepers of bars in Paris, teachers, clerks, several clergymen, and one University professor. There were some Polish men, husbands of the women in our building, and a few unhappy Norwegians, Czechs, Belgians, and Dutchmen, who did not know why they had been taken, and

were, in fact, released fairly soon after our arrival.

Rarely can such a variegated crowd of people have been housed within four walls. I must admit that I found the international atmosphere of the camp rather stimulating; and having once resigned myself to the prospect of prolonged captivity, and found means of conquering the public enemies numbers one and two, dirt and bugs, I was not intimidated by public enemy number three—boredom. With such a varied collection of human beings to study, there were even compensations for life in a concentration camp.

V

BEHIND THE BARS

Sometimes people ask me, "And how did you pass the time in the camp?"

It is a question which is difficult to answer. The miracle was that we passed the time, and the time passed, without our doing anything! At first, half of it went in waging the war to end dirt; while the other half was divided between eating, reading, sleeping and talking scandal. After two or three weeks, when life was organised into some sort of routine, we spent time in different activities of all sorts.

These varied according to individuals; some people never did anything at all; others snatched the opportunity for reading, and writing, and drawing; others got jobs in the camp offices, and worked at card-indexing, acted as interpreters, or helped in the kitchens and sewing-rooms of the barracks.

Some public-spirited people, imbued with a sense of duty and a desire to improve the world around them, started a committee which occupied a great deal of their time, and drew in a great many helpers.

The Committee did a lot of good work, in spite of abuse from various sections of the camp, some of whom would have liked to run it themselves, but had not had the idea in time.

The initiators of the British Committee made their plans, got the Kommandant's consent, and announced that there would be elections in the camp to constitute it on a democratic basis. They asked for delegates from each room to vote.

Ronke and I went along to the outhouse where the meeting was in progress, and found nearly the whole camp assembled there, with our Oxonian Tommy presiding. Names

were being read out, and we were asked to vote on them, but as nobody knew anybody, the election was rather haphazard. The result was that there were some dismal failures among the elected members, and the whole business had to be repeated after some weeks, when people had got to know each other better.

Eventually the Committee got into its stride, and organised some useful public services. There was a Post Office, where we queued endlessly in the hopes of getting a letter—a most welcome but rare event, depending on whether or not the envelope addressed to you happened to be at the top or at the bottom of the ever-increasing mountain of correspondence in the office, where the wholly inadequate staff of censors was supposed to deal with it.

There was also a Parcels' Office, with an equally long queue, even more anxious and impatient, where German soldiers undid the packets which arrived, and suspiciously eyed anything unusual; they removed books for censorship, and took away such things as writing-paper, stamps, etc., by which we might have tried to get in touch with the outside world.

There were the Douches, very well organised, and a highly important item in our lives—as our washing facilities were limited to either a tin basin in our rooms, with water brought up three flights of stairs, or else the communal taps and troughs on the ground floor—British women of the Committee controlled the establishment, and arranged the timetable so that each internee had a weekly shower, while two French soldiers stoked the fire, and controlled the temperature of the water. The douche house was one of the few clean and warm places in the barracks, and we used to go there for the pleasure of being out of our rooms, and to talk to Jean, the half-witted, cheery stoker, and Marcel, the good-looking Marseillais, who fancied himself as a ladies' man, and was much tickled to find himself in charge of the women's baths.

In theory, the douches were a good idea, but in practice, and when it was Marcel on duty, the water came out either boiling, scalding the would-be bathers, or else tepid, or else did not run at all. Of the many hours I spent under the douches, very few were really enjoyable!

The Committee took charge of our finances; we were entitled to 300 francs a month, the official prisoners-of-war

allowance, according to international law. But it took a lot of time to start the payments, and in the meantime, the Committee advanced to the most poverty-stricken internees much-needed cash to buy soap, fruit, hairpins, pencils, cigarettes, and so on, at the canteen.

This "La Cantine" was, after the douches, the most popular corner in the camp. It was the only place where we were officially allowed to meet the French prisoners, and to drink alcohol. It acquired something of the atmosphere of a Paris "bistro," and was a friendly, noisy, cheerful place that might have been miles away from the barracks.

Unfortunately, some of the refugees consumed too much good red wine there, and one fine day a woman had to be carried out incapable. The German soldiers, who were nearly all equipped with Leica cameras, took the opportunity of snapping the scene as she emerged.

I heard that the picture was published later in a German newspaper under the heading, "British Women's Debauchery." After that the canteen was closed for drinking and social gatherings, and became just a useful shopping centre.

Another of the Committee's good works was the organising of a squad of "police," volunteers who worked in cleaning up the stairs and passages, and saw that our black-out was effective. (The black-out was, I think, just a part of the "guerre des nerfs," for the Germans did not expect us to be raided. In fact, we heard that they had moved their High Command for the district into quarters right up by the barracks, so as to be shielded by the British women whom the R.A.F. would surely never bomb!) The people in the police were nice, young, and not too officious; we accepted their control and the "corvées" (chores) imposed on us with not too bad a grace.

There was only one "corvée" at which I personally kicked: "la corvée des patates." We were expected to go for hours to peel potatoes in a draughty and horrible shed, which was at other times used alternately as a church and as a concert hall.

On peeling days the potatoes were piled up in huge heaps on the floor, and one's heart sank as one surveyed the black mounds that had to be flattened before one was released. Women sat all round, peeling with frozen fingers the slippery, dirty lumps which often turned out to be rotten.

I could write a whole volume on the potato, and a very

abusive volume it would be. If the "lumpen proletarian" potatoes that we met in the camp were not quite different from the civilised potatoes to which I have since returned, I should refuse ever to look one in the face again! The potato was our staple article of diet, ladled out day after day, with a wetting of greasy soup, or doubtful sauce, till we got tired to death at the sight of meals.

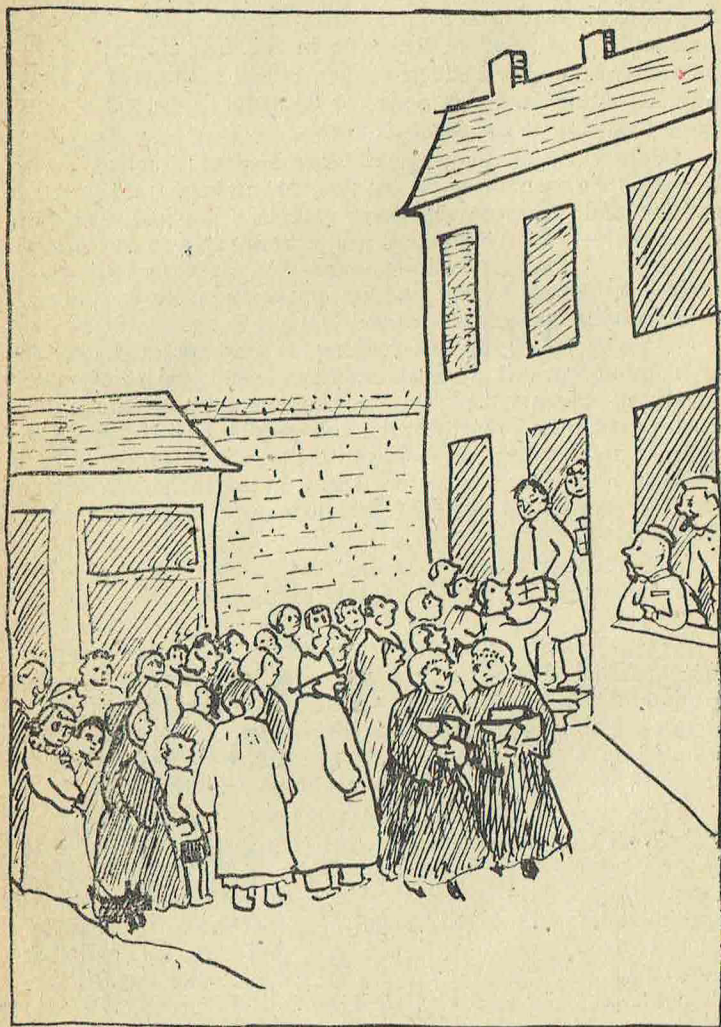
Very occasionally strange vegetables of different kinds appeared on the menu — turnips, "rutabaga" (a sort of swede), and, on great occasions, carrots. We had a regular organised service for stealing raw carrots; it was one of the few ways of getting some vitamins. As a rule we ate them cooked to a nondescript and unappetising mush in the not overclean kitchens of the camp.

As a result of the bad cooking, or perhaps of the rotten or sulphur-sprayed vegetables, there were periodical outbreaks of dysentery. On one famous evening the entire camp, save for a few stalwarts, collapsed. I shall never forget that night, when eleven out of thirteen in my room (I had changed abode by then) were smitten, and I had to act as the Florence Nightingale of the dormitory, a role which I didn't relish.

Apart from these epidemics, the camp showed a fairly clean bill of health, thanks mainly to the good mountain air of Besançon.

There were occasional casualties during the winter; January and February brought snow, which froze on the ground of the courtyard; to go across to the latrines on a winter night was a dangerous expedition which sometimes resulted in broken arms or legs; and there were naturally chills, bronchitis, and cases of pneumonia at times.

The parcels which arrived after some weeks from the Red Cross Organisation were a great mainstay. The morale of the internees, too, rose tremendously at the idea of having a parcel each, and at the familiar sight and smell of steak-and-kidney pudding, bacon and eggs, sausages, marmalade, all the amazing range of tinned food that was sent, and that showed us that England was by no means being starved into surrender, as the Germans tried so hard to prove, but that there was plenty to eat and to spare. People found a great distraction in the business of bartering tins—powdered milk for jam, chocolate for sardines, and so on. Physically and



Queue for Red Cross Parcels.

morally, the health of the camp improved enormously after the parcels arrived.

Nevertheless, there were always cases of illness to be treated. Serious ones were sent to the Hôpital St. Jacques, an old monastery in the town, converted into a hospital, and regarded by us as half-way house to liberty; once under the care of the doctors there one could count on help in being proved a hopeless case, and a chart could be faked, or a radiograph exaggerated to show that it was absolutely necessary for you to leave the camp. As the Germans did not want deaths on their hands, they would discharge you if sufficiently sure of your being at the last gasp; and the doctors would do their best to persuade them of this.

Less serious cases were dealt with at the barracks infirmary, which was sufficiently well equipped, although the doctors there, elegant young French military physicians, with cigarettes in their mouths, and pleasant conversation for their patients, did not inspire great confidence. They knew very little about women's ailments, and their one cure for most troubles was a pill: white for some, and brown for others. Occasionally they would give one advice to come over to the dispensary and gargle daily, or receive an injection. They were naturally in great request among the younger female population, and girls who could find, or make, any excuse for going over to the infirmary for a consultation were looked upon with envy by their friends.

The cultural side of the camp developed rapidly during the first weeks. An educational sub-committee arranged classes of languages, shorthand and literature. Books were sent from Paris by the Y.M.C.A. and friends, and the censors were kept busy. I had a lot of trouble over a book of modern painting with reproductions of Matisse and Renoir, mainly nudes. The soldiers at the parcels office took it on themselves to censor this, and kept us waiting, furious and embarrassed, for ages, while they turned the pages, gloating over what they obviously thought was the last word in pornography. They finally handed the book over with a shake of the head, and a "Nicht gut, Fraulein," regretfully parting with it, as they could not keep it back on political grounds! On the whole, a good many books, novels and classics got through, and we also had access to the library of the barracks, though the choice there was too limited to be really interesting. A few classics and thrillers held their own on

the dusty shelves, between old military histories, and 19th century textbooks on cavalry warfare, suitable for Frenchmen doing their "service militaire" (?) but hardly for women thirsting for literature. I was put off the library for another reason when, in the course of a chapter on Napoleon's 1812 campaign, a large bug emerged from the binding and scuttled across the page!

We took with great energy to out-of-door games and exercises. Margaret Y—, a girl of 28 with a genius for organising and a training in gymnastics, achieved a tour de force in getting some fifty to sixty women out on the yard every morning doing physical jerks. (I must admit that I watched them from the window!) She started netball matches, folk-dancing, volley-ball tournaments. The Kommandant made no objection, as he himself had been a "sportsfuhrer." The Germans used to gather round and look on in open-mouthed amazement at our "longways sets," and "Sellenger's Round," in which everybody enjoyed themselves bouncing about and getting warm, while I, in the unhappy capacity of fiddler, got more frozen every minute, hardly able to hold the Y.M.C.A. violin, let alone produce satisfactory strains!

Our need for physical exercise was satisfied, but some of us found the lack of mental stimulus pretty trying. Politics were discouraged, and any sort of discussion on controversial topics was risky and might be reported back to the Germans as dangerous. In view of this, we greeted the first announcement of a Debating Society with interest; at last there might be a chance of sizing up people and finding out their opinions and attitude towards things.

The first meeting was held in a gloomy room, in our building, and the atmosphere was that of a Salvation Army gathering gone wrong. Our hopes of a lively discussion on forbidden topics, or of hearing exciting talks on interesting subjects faded as the meeting dragged on and, when we were told finally that it was the aim of the club "to pass some monotonous hours in a pleasant social atmosphere" (or something to that effect), we decided that they would have to manage without us. We followed from afar the later activities of the debating society, which was duly formed, and christened "The Optimists." They held weekly meetings at which talks were given on innocuous subjects, such as "Growing Mushrooms in South Devon," "A Visit to Peru

in 1910," and "My Memories of the Manchester Music Hall."

A rival mental stimulus was offered by a highly strung lady, who asked "any internees interested in Higher Thought, The Green Bay, Rudolf Steiner," and other forms of spiritualism, to get in touch with her. But people on the whole preferred to practise their Higher Thought in their own room, and in their own ways, and though there was plenty of spiritualism, table-turning, fortune-telling and thought-reading, the lady theosophist had disappointingly little response to her appeal.

A good deal of time and energy went into the providing of entertainments in the camp; we prided ourselves on the high level of our concerts, although they were arranged under difficulties—so many topics were taboo—and although the accommodation was limited and inadequate. The potato-peeling shed served as hall, and a stage was rigged up—some days it was used as an altar for church services—with curtains made out of mattress covers, and lights improvised by one of the French soldiers.

There was no lack of talent in the camp; pianists from the Conservatoire, a soprano from the Paris Opera, two excellent acrobatic dancers, girls from the Folies Bergères, all were only too anxious to keep their muscles in training, and we had some very good shows, with varied programmes, classical, lowbrow, and topical.

I remember the Christmas concert the best. The French soldiers had a Christmas Eve dinner, provided by the Red Cross, with seven courses, and wine and cigarettes thrown in, their first square meal for months. Some of the internees gate-crashed the dinner, and others poured in from the camp to hear the speeches and the concert which followed. The shed was crowded, and people stood squashed together on tables and benches to see the show. After the concert, chairs were pushed back, and there was dancing, notwithstanding the state of the floor, which was greasy and dirty, and thick with potato peelings which still lay about.

The hall was "booked" for the midnight Mass, and by 11.45 p.m. the soldier in charge began trying to clear the premises.

Unfortunately, the other soldiers were enjoying themselves too much to be willingly interrupted, and the poor, "responsable" shouted and argued in vain, while those of his assistants who were still sober tried to marshall the re-

vellers to the door. But they had left it too late, and the congregation for the Mass was already beginning to arrive. The incoming nuns found themselves confronted by a mob of hilarious soldiers and girls. Elderly ladies arriving for the service in a devout frame of mind were whirled into a dance by tipsy "poilus." Monsier l'Abbé, with the utmost difficulty, made his way through the crowd up to the band, and stopped the music.

But it was some time before the hubbub died down and the service could begin, and the atmosphere could not be called conducive to worship. The Germans may be good organisers, but this seemed to me an example of failure, due to supreme lack of imagination, or ignorance of the French mentality during a "fête."

The next party we were allowed to have was at New Year, and this went off without incident; it was followed by the famous orgy of the Russian New Year, on January 6th. The "White" Russian colony of the camp, who were some sixty strong, had got permission to use the hall, bought wine, and even found vodka, and invited their friends. The scene was, after a short time, one of complete chaos, but it might have passed without disgrace had it not been for an indiscretion on the part of the chief vamp of the barracks, who seized the Kommandant round the waist and fondly embraced him in front of everybody! Her lack of self-control cost us several future concerts, which had been arranged, and had to be cancelled, and we were never again allowed mixed parties in the camp.

This was the occasion of the first action taken by the Kommandant to separate French soldiers and internees. It was followed soon after by much stricter measures.

It was to be expected that in a camp like ours romances should arise between the soldiers and the internees. A lot of the girls had boy friends, and saw as much of them as camp life would allow. As the soldiers worked chiefly in stables and the back yards, these became the regular places of rendezvous — to such unromantic settings is Cupid driven by modern conditions of civilisation!

There are always spoilsports in any community, and many anonymous letters of complaints about the morals of the internees were sent to the Kommandant. In fairness, it must be admitted that he disregarded them at first, but when, after a while, suggestions reached him that even the German

sentries themselves were being demoralised by the British girls, he decided on a purge of the camp.

One fine evening at seven o'clock he sent his cleaning squads round. It was getting dark; the moon was rising behind the hills of Besançon, outlining the Citadelle, and the wavy line of woods beyond it, which we could see with long-eyes above the high walls of the barracks. I was with Ronke talking to the Spanish refugees, and a number of internees were strolling round the courtyard, while the loving couples had retired to the stable yard.

All of a sudden several sentries with full equipment appeared on bicycles, riding madly round the "piste." They stopped our group, and said "All prisoners of war to return immediately to their quarters!" Flabbergasted at the sudden stop to our innocent conversation, we said good-night to our friends. The sentry rode on and ordered other people equally to go in. In the meantime the Kommandant himself had gone with a group of officers to the back of the buildings and was seeing personally to the purification of the stables ("like an avenging angel driving the sinners out of Paradise," said Ronke, who had been brought up on Milton and the Bible, in Nigeria).

After that evening the French soldiers were segregated at one end of the courtyard, mournfully playing bowls, or kicking a football about, while their girls waved and signalled to them from the other end of the yard—which even the sentry with his helmet and rifle patrolling the No Man's Land in between them could not prevent.

During the day, too, we were forbidden to talk to our friends, and this was a real privation, for it partly dried up our source of news from the outside world. But it was not difficult to get round the regulations; and if we were unable to speak to the soldiers, there were workmen who came from Besançon, and brought us news they had heard on the British radio.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these good people, who did their best to satisfy our craving for news; in our state of splendid isolation the feeling of being in contact with the outside world in any way at all was tremendously important: bad food, lack of sanitation, boredom, captivity itself, were bearable if one knew what was happening beyond the prison wall.

VI

PRIVATE LIVES

We three, Cora, Ibironke, and I, lived as it were on an island in our little room in Bafiment B. We had frequent visitors, refugees from the noise and crowd of their own big dormitories, and others, admirers of Cora's beautiful blue eyes.

One of Cora's victims was a middle-aged German, who worked in one of the offices of the administration—a mild man with the face and mentality of a suet-pudding. He had, since being posted here, decided to learn French and English, and made this an excuse to visit us daily. Herr M.'s knowledge of both languages consisted of what he had recently acquired from a friend, who, I am afraid, had been pulling his leg, in an exercise which he had been advised to learn by heart: "The verb to have: I have, you have, he has, we have, they have. Kiss my behind." He had painfully learnt this "auswendig," also the equivalent in French! His idea of taking lessons was to write down a phonetic transcription of an English version of "Heilige Nacht," and other familiar German songs, and the rest of the time to sit and gaze adoringly at Cora. Sometimes he produced from under his coat various good things from the town, and even from the cupboards of the camp administration. The visits were strictly against the rules, and he used to go through agonies, torn between his hopeless love of Cora, and his fear of losing his job. His visits left us in a state of nervous collapse, as every footstep on the stairs seemed to be the tread of a superior officer coming to the room to arrest him.

To add to the complications, another admirer of Cora's also started visiting us, he, too, with stolen and very welcome goods—white bread, oranges, and sweets. Cora believed in exploiting the stupidity of mankind, and would arrange it so that the Frenchman and the German played Cox-and-Box.

On New Year's Day, we were peacefully consuming our daily portion of potato mush, when Herr M—— suddenly appeared, with an invitation to us all three to go out in his car for the afternoon. Not averse to this unexpected chance of a joyride, at the expense of the army and their petrol, we accepted. Herr M—— faked an "Ausweis," and with this pass, swept us off in the grey camouflaged car, disregarding

the astonishment of the sentry at the gate. We bowled along past the grey wintry fields, enjoying our first sight of open country after our weeks of captivity.

We stopped at a small village some ten miles off, and stepped out at the door of a little pub; from which came sounds of merriment and music. Herr M . . . ushered us into the smoke room. We were astonished to find ourselves back in a beerhouse in Munich! Through clouds of German cigarette smoke, we saw soldiers drinking at the table, while one played away at an accordeon. Herr M . . . introduced us all round, and we sat down by the soldiers who turned out to be Bavarians of a Tirolese regiment. They were not Nazis and would not talk politics in spite of our efforts to hear what they thought about Hitler and the war. We drank to "1941"—without going into details—and to our respective returns home. Herr M . . . drove us back to the camp in the evening, very satisfied with his afternoon, and not at all worried about his reputation. He took an even greater risk some time afterwards, when along with other Australians and South Africans (German women in those countries not having been interned), Cora was released.

The evening she left, we sorrowfully said goodbye to her at the barrack gates; M . . . 's distress was pathetic to behold. He went to the station with her at 11 at night, and helped her with her boxes. While he waited in her carriage saying his last few tender words of farewell, the train slid quietly out of the station and he was carried off. He travelled some fifty miles before the train stopped and gave him a chance of getting down. He was in an uneviable state of mind, faced with the prospect of a three hour walk through the night, and of an interview with an irate chief, probably resulting in getting the sack. He stepped bravely out, and walked for hours through the darkness, along the frozen roads, stumbling into snow drifts, slipping on the ice, and at last getting to the station where the early train to Besancon stopped at 5 a.m. Poor Herr M . . . ! He disappeared from circulation for a long time after that, and when we next saw him, was thin and pale and told us he had been for several weeks in hospital—an explanation which we did not question too closely.

After Cora's departure, our little room was requisitioned for the children's school, which the nuns had organised, and Ronke and I faced homelessness. We decided to

stick together, which made the problem of finding a space more difficult, as by this time people were settled in, and did not welcome newcomers to their rooms.

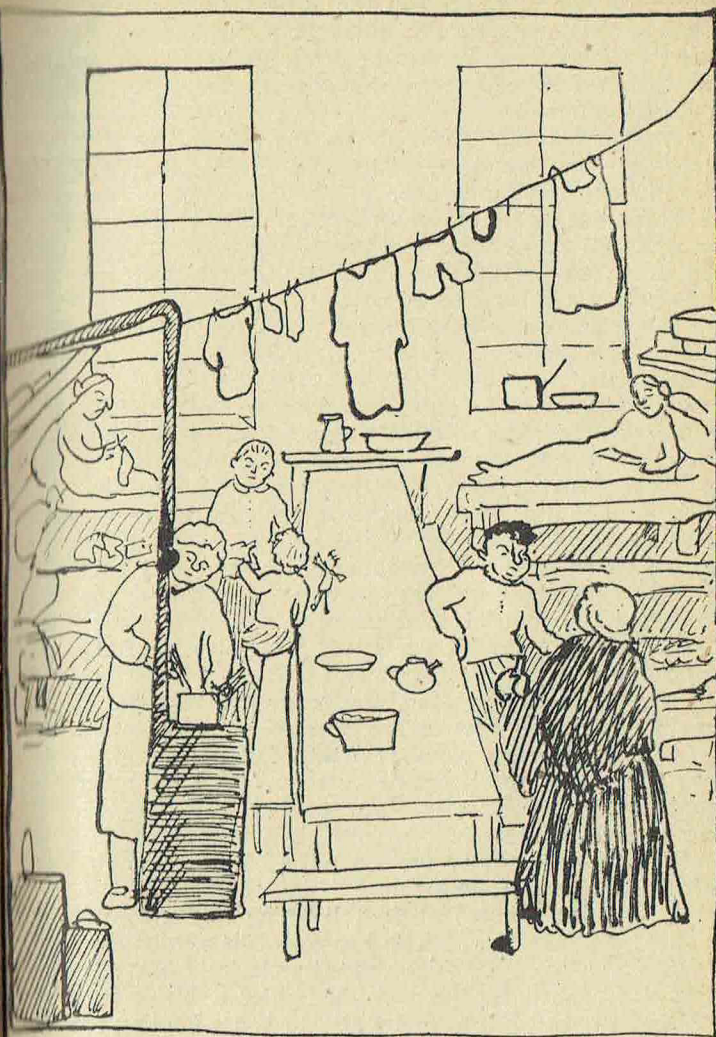
We had an unpleasant glimpse of racial prejudice and snobbery among the British; in a room where there were two empty places, and where the French "responsible" of our building advised us to instal ourselves, the "chef de chambre", an educated English woman, refused to take us in. "It was against her principles to live in a room with a coloured girl." I was utterly amazed at this exhibition of racial feeling, and insisted on going with her to the officer in charge.

The French, and even the Goebbels-educated Germans in the bureau were frankly amazed at the attitude of the British woman towards the negress—the French soldier said in a loud aside, "Personally I prefer coloured women to white: they're more faithful!"—and they promised to refer the question to the Kommandant. Mrs D . . . however slipped round to a friend of hers, the German doctor in the hospital, and got him to promise that no extra internees should be put in her room.

She obtained this assurance in writing, and there was no getting round it. When Ronke and I went back to the office the next day there was nothing more to be done. We came away disconsolately wondering where we should lay our heads that night; through the window of the office I saw Schwester Ruth sitting with the other German sisters, making lists, their solemn round faces bent over the papers.

We called in to her, and explained our problem, and she turned to one of the others and conferred for a moment or two. Then one of the women said, "You shall to my room come. There, gives it another neger girl. They shall be friends." So it was arranged, and we moved up to number 13, in the other building, a room for ten people where there was already eleven, bringing their number up to thirteen. I slept on the top of a double-decker, and every time I turned over the bed rocked, waking poor Ronke, who would moan "Frida must you?" in a pathetic voice from down below.

The average age in this room was about seventy years old—brought down by ourselves, and by a child of five, who lived with its mother in the room, hardly ever going out, and overflowing with animal spirits and perpetual chatter.



Room 13 seen from top of double-decker bed.

The other "neger girl" turned out to be a Jamaican woman of about 50, diametrically different to Ronke in every respect except colour; instead of being bosom friends as the Schwester had hoped, after a day together they were hardly on speaking terms!

We were kindly received, on the whole, by the old ladies, but soon found the atmosphere of the room unbearable, in more ways than one.

There was an anti-fresh air league, and the temperature was about 80 F. A great deal of cooking went on, each old lady liking to prepare her own meals, and dish up her ration of mush in her own way.

The window was only opened when the heat and smell became too strong even for old "Grandmère," the president of the league.

At night I would climb down from my lofty perch, and creep across the room as quietly as possible, to open a chink of window and preserve us all from suffocation. Unluckily the old women did not realise the benevolent nature of my action, or take it as kindly as they should; there was a grand row over it, and after that I was reduced to going outside into the courtyard for a breath of air in the small hours of the night. Even the thought of a week's confinement in the guardroom (the official punishment if one was found outside one's room after 10 p.m.) was preferable to stifling in the black hole of Calcutta upstairs.

During the daylight too, the room was insupportable: perpetual bickering went on, occasionally bursting into open warfare. The room's population was divided into two factions, one led by the "chef de chambre" and the other by Grandmère. There were constant skirmishes on small issues, which would develop into big-scale battles.

We christened the encounters "The battle of the Broken Basin," "the Spilt Soup incident," the "Three Days War," and were rather amused at first, listening to the rumble of the guns: old Mme S. . . with her voice like a gruff cannon, Mlle B. . . like a machine-gun, Grandmère's high-pitched whine like a shell on the way—but after a bit it became very wearing, and Ronke and I started house-hunting again. After a few days' desperate search we installed ourselves in room 101.

It was extremely difficult to gatecrash this room. Nobody could say there was not enough space, as it was a huge

dormitory, built for some 30 beds, and actually containing only ten, of which six were occupied. The reason for this was that the ceiling at one end of the room was falling in—the plaster hung in tatters round gaping holes, through which the rafters and the open sky were visible. My joy at finding this half-empty room, which gave the impression of unlimited space after our cramped quarters, could not be dumped down even by the unfriendly reception I got from its occupants when I knocked and asked for admission.

The "chef de chambre" was a beautiful, haughty, aristocratic English girl, whose main object in life seemed to me to keep out invaders. We had a rather acrimonious dialogue.

F.: You surely have plenty of room for two refugees?

C.: Yes . . . there is room . . . but you know we have a case of mumps? . . . surely it would be unwise? . . .

F. (airily): Not at all—I've had mumps already.

C. (waving a spotty arm): We have bugs . . . thousands of them.

F. (undaunted): Never mind; they probably won't touch me.

C.: The camp bête noire, Mrs. L——, is coming to sleep here this week.

F. (cheerfully): Oh, that's fine; I rather like her.

C. (in desperation): I'm quite sure our Schwester won't let you come.

F.: I'll see about that, don't you worry! (Exit F. in direction of Schwester, and fixes up immediate move into 101.)

Thus we broke into the room, and settled down, and by dint of sheer perseverance and will power we smashed through the barrier of exclusiveness and self-sufficiency which the six girls had erected for their protection against the outside world. They had been a clique ever since the beginning of the camp, but were now partly disbanded owing to the epidemic of mumps. Priscilla and Renée were in hospital; Clare was taken soon after our entry; there were left in the room Maria from Vienna—an exquisite Austrian, fair and fragile, who lay in bed all day, devouring every book that she or we could lay hands on—Rebecca, Rhoda and Pat.

Rebecca, a typical example of the "British subjects" in the camp, was interned because her father, a Polish Jew, and her mother, a Russian emigrée, en route for Paris, were

staying in Jaffa, Palestine, when she was born. It would be difficult to imagine anything less English than Rebecca, with her heavy oriental beauty, her great black eyes, and eastern temperament, which would one day take the form of excessive exuberance, and set her singing at the top of her voice, and the next plunge her into gloom from which none of our efforts would rouse her. She had never met an English person before entering the camp, and spoke not a word of English. Her two passions were painting and revolutionary activity, and she promised to make a mark in both. At seventeen years she was more mature than most women of twenty-five; she had read a great deal and been through much more.

Her father, from whom she inherited the lively and adventurous side of her character, was a leather worker, who lived in the poorest Jewish district in Paris; he had a passion for speculation in doubtful but glamorous transactions, into which he was led by shady emigré friends. He had lost every centime in an unsuccessful deal when Rebecca was twelve, the furniture had been confiscated, and the whole family had had to live on the meagre charity of friends, in a leaky shed in the suburbs of Paris, four in a bed, for many months.

Rebecca had been the moral support of the family all through their trials, consoling her desperate father, calming her neurotic mother, and looking after her small and fractious sister; in between crises, when she had to hold the family together, she had found time to read and digest most of the available French literature and philosophy, and we found her judgment on novels and films nearly always infallible.

Rhoda, on the other hand, was as lowbrow as Rebecca was intellectual. Her great asset was a pair of most seductive eyes; she also had a wonderful touch for making omelettes. She suffered from an inferiority complex, and aspired to higher things than cooking, in spite of our assurances that the foundations of art and culture are built on *La Cuisine*.

After one of our lengthy discussions about life or literature, poor Rhoda would be found sitting on her bed, vainly trying to make head or tail of Verlaine or Rimbaud. She was thoroughly miserable when she didn't know what we were talking about; we encouraged her to go over to the soldiers' headquarters, where she had plenty of admirers, and

from whence she would bring back cigarettes and sweets to enliven our unexciting existence.

Last but not least of our co-mates in exile was Pat, brim-full of charm and vitality. She had had a varied career, beginning with an orthodox education at a British boarding-school, continuing with a secretarial training, a dull commercial job, flight to France, life in the bohemian family of a French painter up to June, 1940. She had come north in the hopes of getting back to England, just at the moment of the debacle, and had got stuck in Paris like most of us. Her career continued: job as a maid at the American hospital in Paris, then as barmaid in a canteen of five hundred French policemen (where she had learnt to hold her own in any sort of situation, and to speak a fluent and expressive *Parigot*), then as governess to the children of a Socialist deputy, from whose house she was finally taken by the Germans.

Pat knew a lot of my friends in London, played the violin, liked modern poetry; we had plenty of common ground, and got on extremely well.

Ronke and I settled in quickly enough to the room, and soon were looked on as old stagers. The atmosphere was most "sympathique," once one had pierced the steel-plated armour of unfriendliness, and everybody shared their property, from tooth paste to parcels, without any distinction. The motto of 101, "Un pour tous, Tous pour un," was inscribed over the door.

We christened the room "Les Arts et Métiers"—every kind of activity flourished there, from painting to Scottish reels. Rebecca practised her art, dipping pieces of wood into the stove, and decorating the walls with charcoal frescoes; Pat and I played violin duets, on two instruments provided by the Y.M.C.A.—anything but Strads—driving our next-door neighbours to distraction. We found a couple of rusty tools on the camp rubbish heaps, and practised fencing at the far end of the room; we danced with great energy every evening, till the people underneath came up and begged us to desist, as the bugs were falling from the ceiling on to their heads!

Reasons for celebrating were always turning up, and we had several good parties in our room. Birthdays, anniversaries of great events, arrival of good news—anything served as an excuse. We usually managed to get hold of some sort

of liquor, and Rhoda spent the afternoon converting the camp food into some eatable form.

I shall never forget Pat's birthday party; we borrowed a gramophone and some records, and invited the doctors from the infirmary (just to annoy our neighbours). The drink, brought from the town, was poisonous in taste, but powerful, and after a few drinks Rebecca was in fine form; she waltzed round the room all alone, singing her repertoire of songs that were too doubtful to be sung when sober, while Pat rushed about, breaking gramophone records and forcing drink down our throats. We all danced, and made a good deal of noise.

In the middle of the celebrations the "police" arrived. We stopped the record, which was blaring out "swing"; Ronke collapsed on the bed, and the doctors froze into professional positions by the side, pretending to feel her pulse, while the rest of us looked as sober as we could. I heard later that there were complaints about us from our neighbours, who had obviously been listening enviously to our revels and waiting to denounce us to the authorities. We were threatened by the "head of the police" with a splitting-up of our room if we had any more parties. Not showing our alarm at this threat, we made a dignified reply and protested at being treated like schoolchildren.

Nevertheless, we were fairly careful after that to soft-pedal our parties, for the threat to break up our devoted band was a serious one, and not to be unnecessarily risked.

One morning in March, our schwester arrived with the unwelcome news that the building was to be disinfected, to get rid of the bugs, and that we must all clear out for a few days. We howled with wrath, but without effect. The building was evacuated, and hermetically sealed, while men with gasmasks sprayed the walls and woodwork doling out death to the bugs.

We came back to find our ceiling mended, and the room filled up with a new lot of internees, just arrived from Nantes; a very small room next door was empty and, rather than share our dear 101 with strangers, we all moved out, and packed into number 99, the five of us on top of one another like sardines.

The lack of space did not prevent our going on with our manifold activities and, in fact, adding to them. We discovered that we badly needed new clothes. Hitherto, we

had gone about in the thick trousers and heavy horizon-blue military coats distributed to us at the beginning of the internment by the camp authorities.

Much as we liked being clad like French soldiers, the weather was getting too warm for army wear, and linen dresses and light trousers were indicated. We discovered too, that the covers of our palliasses were made of a very nice fine linen, which would be ideal for summer clothes. A little organising, a few mattresses stolen from unoccupied beds, several expeditions at dead of night to dump the straw or woollen stuffing of the palliasses on the rubbish heaps outside, and we had yards and yards of beautiful material at our disposal.

The problem of disguising the stuff was solved by buying, through some of the soldiers, dozens of packets of dye. For about a week, our room looked like a "teinturerie," brights bits of cloth hanging across it, and bubbling away on the stove. Within a few days were all wearing various garments hand-made, and home-dyed, of which we felt justifiably proud.

April came, the weather got warm, and we were thankful for our efforts, as we sat outside with the sun blazing down. We took out books and even meals, and got brown sitting in the empty carts in the stable yard. Towards the middle of April rumours began to go round that we were to be transferred to another camp, and became daily more persistent. We always discounted 90 per cent. of the rumours that we heard, knowing how fertile the ground was, and how they started and circulated through wishful thinking, by optimists or pessimists, as the case might be. However, in this case even the German schwester at last admitted that it was true that we were going to another—"and much nicer"—place. By the end of the month everybody knew that it was to be good-bye to Besançon, and that our destination was Vittel, a watering-place in the Vosges. We were to be housed in hotels, where there would be hot water, and possibly even baths!

One afternoon the order came through the loudspeaker—which usually shrieked out incoherent sounds, but for once in a way was understandable—that we must be packed and ready to leave the barracks in two days' time! And that all our plates and utensils must be handed in; and that every one of us and every garment we possessed must be deloused

before leaving. This, it appeared, was the result of an urgent wire from the hotel proprietor at Vittel, who foresaw thousands of filthy, verminous women, arriving on the premises of the Grand Hotel, and ruining them for evermore.

The idea of delousing us seemed to the internees natural and reasonable. But there was a general outcry at the way in which the German authorities proposed to do the job. We heard that we were to be compelled to go to the douches in groups, and there scrubbed from top to toe by the German schwesters. Meanwhile, our clothes were to be taken direct to the delousing station, and we were to walk across the yard to collect them, wrapped each in a blanket!

Visions rose before the eyes of nervous old ladies of the possibilities of such a proceeding. Blankets were draughty things to parade in, especially after a warm douche; they were also not very stable, and might easily fall off in the process of crossing the yard.

In any case, would not the German soldiers be quite capable of taking advantage of the semi-nudity of the women internees? The feeling against the delousing grew stronger and stronger, till that evening it was decided to take action against the proposal. The "police" went round to each room, canvassing for the Committee's proposal to send a delegation to the Kommandant, and suggesting that the rest of the internees should turn out to support the delegation in its protest against the methods proposed.

We all heartily agreed, and the next morning at 5 a.m. very nearly the whole camp turned out into the yard outside the Kommandantur.

It was a spectacular gathering, and the German authorities must have had a shock. They allowed the delegation to come in and put the case for a different handling of the delousing; while they were conferring inside, a hysterical woman in the crowd outside started abusing the Germans, the sentries came up, pushed the women back with their rifle butts, and broke up the whole demonstration.

We were ordered back to our rooms, and told not on any account to open our windows. A squad of sentries were posted in the middle of the courtyard, their rifles stacked against each other, ready for action. One soldier fired into the air as a woman passed him.

"Why did you fire?" asked an officer, coming up.

"She laughed as she passed me," was the answer—an

effective example of the sensitiveness to mockery of the Wehrmacht soul.

The main thing was that we won our point. We were sent to the douches in groups, and allowed to stay there while our clothes were baked and brought back to us. The whole business took much longer, but none of us minded that. Our democratic methods and our demonstration had worked, and we were quite proud of our Committee who had arranged it. We little knew how it rankled with the Kommandant, or guessed the reprisals that he would take later. In the meantime, we got into the train for Vittel, and steamed out of Besançon, feeling half sorry to be leaving the barracks, but curious and almost elated at the thought of going into new and different surroundings.

VII

VITTEL

The train crawled through the flat country west of the Vosges mountains. We sat squashed in our carriage, the five of us, and a German sentry in full battle equipment. He was oldish, a fatherly sort of chap, who, touched at the sight of Pat's uncomfortable slumbers, took off his army coat and spread it over her. There was, as a matter of fact, little warmth in the field-grey ersatz stuff, compared with the good French and British khaki coats, we noticed. Of better quality were his rifle and the big knife which he carried in his belt: we had a good look at these, and saw that they were both made in Czechoslovakia. "A present from Mr. Chamberlain," I remarked. A broad grin of understanding spread over his face.

On and on the train crept, going northward, while the country grew flatter and duller, and we felt we were travelling through infinity. After many hours of the green monotonous plains, we slowed down, and found we were approaching Vittel; we could see through trees our first view of the place: huge hotels like mausoleums, shutters closed, empty villas, deserted streets—a typical spa out of season. The train drew up and disgorged us. We assembled in the street outside the station and marched between sentries half a mile down the road. We were getting used to this procedure, and could hardly imagine a walk without the escort of troops!

The inhabitants of Vittel, mostly very old men, children and women, had gathered by the side of the road, and were watching us with suspicious looks. We heard later that they thought we were German women being sent to take a cure at the spa by the Nazi authorities—a Strength through Joy group, or something of the sort, though, Heaven knows, our appearance was neither particularly strong nor joyful!

When we arrived at the gates of the Grand Hotel, we found we were awaited by a lot of important-looking German officers, and a number of men in civilian clothes. These, we discovered in the nick of time, were moviemen, who were just about to take a newsreel of our arrival. The word ran down the line like lightning down a rod, and everybody automatically turned their heads. I often longed to see the result of that documentary, featuring the backs of our necks!

We went into the hotel to find our rooms, armed with slips of paper with the number; ours was 660, right up on the top floor.

The proprietor, a small, narrow-faced man with an extremely worried expression, was standing at the lift gates trying to stave off about sixty women who all wanted to go up in the lift at once.

He spent his afternoon as lift-boy.

He might well look worried; it was a hotel manager's nightmare, this invasion of the premises by a horde of females, dirty, tired, probably harbingers of all sorts of unwanted things, in old military coats, with hair flying, and bundles of uncouth luggage.

I felt like something out of a play which had got into the wrong set; against the new background of gilt furnishings, marble pillars, pseudo-Persian carpets, our Besançon costumes must have looked exceedingly incongruous.

The Grand Hotel is in the best watering-place tradition: its pretentious façade hides an even more pompous interior—high lounges, and lofty salons full of sham marble (which, to our highly food-conscious minds, suggested Gorgonzola cheese and raw beef), ornamented galleries, twisted candelabras, the whole thing reminiscent of a glorified Lyons Corner House.

The bedrooms were in the same style, with high ceilings, enormous mirrors, plush carpets and carved fireplaces.

Happily for our "family," number 660, on the sixth floor, where doubtless the more impoverished of the cure-takers were housed, was far less pompous than most, and a

very attractive room. It had all the long-forgotten comforts of civilisation—beds with spring mattresses and clean sheets, running hot and cold water, cupboards for clothes. No longer should we have to sleep between bristly blankets, or live "in our suitcases," and wash in cold water out of minute tin bowls.

Ronke and Rebecca and I went on an expedition of exploration. We found a small twisting staircase, which led up to a passage under the roof, and to a number of tiny rooms, packed with treasures: lamps, bowls, crockery, rolls of wall-paper, ideal for Rebecca's painting.

The stairs led on up to the roof; we stood on the top of the hotel and saw the whole layout of the place: the group of three hotels where we were stabled—next to our own, the Palace, which was being converted into a hospital, and to the left the Continental, where the old men, and the nuns, were being lodged. Below lay the park, a carpet of green trees, wonderfully refreshing to our eyes, starved of everything but the blackness and stark grimness of the barracks yard. Seeing the hills beyond, so near, yet so inaccessible, I was overcome by a wave of nostalgia, and unbearable longing to get out.

The park was not yet opened to us, as extra barbed wire was being put up round it. But a few days later we were able to go into it, and walk across the grass, which felt to our feet like velvet, after the cinders of Vauban. The moviemen and reporters turned up again, and stalked us through the park; later an article appeared in *Paris-Soir*, describing our perfect surroundings and the idyllic life we were leading.

It was anything but idyllic, though. After Besançon, it certainly was an improvement. We had none of the unpleasant chores, nor the struggle against dirt. But the "sympathique" and democratic atmosphere evaporated, and we became a population of undistinguished hotel visitors, wearing normal clothes, even hats and gloves. We hardly saw the soldiers. Each room kept itself more or less to itself, and an atmosphere of gentility reigned, which I for one liked less than the bohemian community spirit which had reigned in Vauban.

Our democratic Committee sank, wrecked by a human torpedo, who shall be nameless, and it was replaced by a sort of quisling government, responsible directly to the Kom-

mandant. The German sisters were sent off to help in the war effort, and quislings did the work of taking the roll call, and patrolling the hotel and grounds to prevent us misbehaving or escaping. We were not represented any longer to the authorities by people of our own choice, nor had we any say in running the life of the camp. Perhaps it was an illusion to think that we ever had had; perhaps we were, in fact, just like a movement of opposition in a Fascist state. We were under the thumb of the rulers, and just had to possess our souls in patience, doing what underground work we could, while those with the big guns ran the show, with their underlings to spy on us and denounce us.

I myself was looked on askance by quislings and patriotic British internees alike, when I went round talking to the sentries.

But it was worth risking a few dirty looks and whispers of "pro-German" to hear the feelings and reactions of the men in Hitler's army. Some were communicative, others just dumb. All were quite obviously thoroughly bored with the war, and longed to get home. They used to produce photographs of their wives and children, from whom some of them had been parted four or five years, having taken part in Spanish, Czechoslovakian and other "campaigns."

The sentries lived in a little house in the park grounds, called the Villa des Fées. Anything less fairylike than these men can hardly be imagined, and I had to smother my feelings every time I passed them, grotesque and ungainly, in their shoddy uniforms, their great heavy boots, their thick belts with "Gott mit uns" stamped on the tin buckles, sitting outside the "fairies' house," while from the radio inside rolled out the military strains of a brass band, or the thick guttural voice of some Nazi propagandist.

In the spring of 1941 we had many arguments with the Germans on politics and on the war. In May they were on the top of the world after Hitler's Balkan victories; in June, when war was declared on the Soviet Union, they were one and all firmly convinced that the German Army would walk over Russia and be established in Moscow within a month. They were all panting to be off to the Eastern Front. "Lieber dort als hier," said one. "It will be a picnic."

When I asked him why he thought it was going to be a walk-over, he answered solemnly that "the Führer wills it so." Another said "Our Führer has always been right."

I reserved my arguments against the infallibility of the Führer till a few weeks later, when they were still a very long way from Moscow. July wore on, and August and September, and the German Army, though advancing, was encountering a resistance which these soldiers, after their experience of Belgium and France, could not believe. News was filtering through of slaughter and decimation of the Wehrmacht troops in Russia.

Many of our sentries had brothers and friends killed or missing. The Kommandant's girl secretaries wept copiously when we talked to them of Russia—one had a fiancé killed, and another's friend was fighting there. Batches of soldiers were sent off at intervals.

Pat, who worked in the office on card-indexing, saw them at close quarters; one morning they brought quantities of drink into the bureau and proceeded to get tight. They were going off East. We had names for them, Hatchet-Face, and Fatty (who used to begin his telephone calls with "Heil Hitler" and finish up with "Heil Hitler, Krieg ist alles"), and Moon-face; and we felt almost sorry for them being sent like sheep to the slaughter. Moonface was in tears as he said good-bye.

One of the officers who was sent to the front returned shortly afterwards; he had a bad heart and could not stand the strain.

"Don't talk to me of Russia," he said. "It's hell let loose there. And as for the villages in the rear, they are either completely gutted by the people before they leave, or else they are inhabited by civilians who have arms hidden, and can't be trusted an inch."

Of course, the Russian system was "all wrong," but he admitted that the organisation of the collective farms and communications between the villages in the Ukraine was excellent. High tribute from a German officer!

The news of resistance on the Russian front, such as we could get in the camp, kept up our morale more than anything else. In the meantime, our own life went on, and the summer passed not unpleasantly, in the park, reading, playing tennis, sunbathing on the roof, organising concerts and shows. The most active of the ex-Committee people, Margaret Y—, continued her gym exercises, and had a flourishing class of young and old, touching their toes, standing on their heads, and practising all brands of choreography from

Eurythmics to Russian and Polish folk-dances. We always had a packed house for the concerts, and I shall never forget a display of national dances, put on by Margaret, at which the whole of the High Command sat in the front row, carried away, forgetting the teaching of Goebbels, and applauding enthusiastically the Russian and Palestinian dances performed by a young Jewess.

We were lucky in having, in the camp, a very good pianist and excellent all-round musician, Mrs. H——, a very small and frail, but indefatigable Frenchwoman, married to an Englishman, who trained our choir to a high level. She also had instruments sent from the Y.M.C.A. in Paris, and we formed an orchestra consisting of three violins, two penny-whistles, a 'cello, an accordeon, and jazz band percussion. This practised hard, and performed adaptations of Schubert and Sibelius with great gusto and enjoyment to ourselves, if not to the camp. We foresaw great possibilities for our symphony orchestra, and even laid plans for a performance of "The Magic Flute."

Another ambitious project was that of getting up a performance of Aristophanes "Lysistrata." This, with its story of a host of women who, their husbands absent at the war, hold the fort, and defy the old men, seemed a peculiarly suitable play for our company!

We thought of enrolling all the women of the camp in the caste, with a chorus of old men, robing them in white sheets, and staging the drama on the pseudo-classical steps leading down from the hotel to the Park, a very suitable setting.

The book of words never arrived, though we asked for it; and probably, if it had, would never have passed the censorship. But it was amusing planning out these productions, even if they never materialised.

One of the chief diversions of the internees was the cinema show, which was given every week-end in the Casino of the hotel. The films were, on the whole, fairly good, Charles Boyer, and Raimu, and Fernandel, who always took us out of our sad surroundings and provided a good laugh. We were never allowed American or British films or anything that savoured faintly of anti-Nazi satire. The Germans tried to put some of their propaganda over, in a film showing the harmony reigning between workers and their bosses in the Nazi régime, but this was received with such sceptical

cat-calls that they desisted from tendentious films for a while; when later they announced a rabidly anti-semitic film there was such an outcry in the camp that it was changed to a harmless French documentary.

Apart from such occasional breaks, life ran on, in an utterly monotonous calm. When the desire for a change of scene from the eternal hotel surroundings, the arcade, the Grand Source, even the park, became too overwhelming, we would find some excuse for getting out of the camp for a short walk; a visit to the dentist or to the photographer, was pleaded as a vital necessity.

"Let's have a walk to the Censor's office," I suggested to Pat one day. This was easy to organise; to get called up one had only to write a couple of extra lines over the allowed number, on the weekly letters which went through the censorship.

The censor fell into our trap; two days later we heard our names called out over the camp loudspeaker, and presented ourselves at the gate. A soldier took us across the road, and we walked through the garden, thick with roses and clematis, of the villa which had been converted into the censor's office. The other internees with us were trembling at the thought of the punishment they might get for indiscretions in their correspondence. While they were being interviewed in the lion's den, we nipped into the book-censoring department. A heavy, unshaven German officer was sitting surrounded by mountains of literature, ranging from poetry to thrillers. He looked slightly astonished at our invasion.

"You have had two of my books for six weeks," I said, "and we are saying you the trouble of sending them across." He looked even more amazed. "One is Shakespeare, whom you surely can't object to—that is, if you understand him." His vanity was pricked, and he proceeded to give us a lecture on the German appreciation of Shakespeare. "Well, then," I said, "you have no objection to my taking it?" and picking it up, we said good-bye, and left him, still flabbergasted, and too much surprised to make any further objection.

In the other office, a very bland and unpleasant type of Nazi was sitting with my overlong letter before him. He reproved me for breaking the rule. "Our work is trying enough, Fraulein." He went on to say that he was just as miserable

in Vittel as we were, and felt himself as much a prisoner as we did—which gave me some satisfaction. He released me with a caution, after I had promised not to repeat the offence, which I did in good faith, not wanting to return for an interview with this particular man.

There was little, apart from expeditions and entertainments, to vary the routine of our life. People began to find the monotony and meaningless eternity of captivity very trying, and took to various forms of emotional escape. Spiritualism became very popular; Rhoda took to it, and would come back white and jaded in the morning, after a night spent sitting up round a table with friends, with her fingers touching a saucer, receiving "messages" in which she frankly believed.

I once made the experiment with her, and was frankly amazed at the way the saucer rushed from end to end of the table, while Rhoda wrote down conglomerations of letters, most of which made nonsense, but a few of which could be converted into some sort of meaning. Even the doctors in the hospital spent all their spare time taking down messages, and sometimes got fantastic results; but nothing would ever convince me, a hardened sceptic, that there was not some conscious or semi-conscious control by the most strong-willed or intelligent of the spirit-raisers.

There was too much wishful thinking to be convincing. The same thing occurred to me when I heard women telling each other's fortunes by cards or by palms; they made handsome profits by recounting the pleasant things that were going to happen to the willingly credulous subject.

Religion was a solace to some of the internees; the nuns found fertile soil for the seeds of belief which they assiduously proceeded to sow, from the very first days of the internment. In a few months they had about forty converts, who regularly attended the Mass in the improvised church. A procession was arranged on the Fête de l'Assomption, and the scores of nuns, with a fair following of Frenchwomen, and prisoners of war, followed a large canopy of yellow damask through the park to an altar, constructed in the corner of the "children's field." It was all quite impressive, and the Germans stood round taking photographs. The French soldiers, who had knocked up the canopy out of hotel bedroom curtains, and erected the altar, were delighted with the results.

Autumn was approaching. The park grew dark green,

became touched with russet and gold, and by October was a yellow blaze. I can never avoid a "nostalgie d'automne" at the beauty of the dying embers of summer, and this year it was almost overpowering. The longing to get out of captivity, and the thought of the long winter ahead of us, became unbearable. Some fifty workmen from Nancy had been brought to install central heating in the hotels, and the sight of these measures for our permanent stay in the place determined me to get away. Pat and I laid our plans. We took into our confidence one of the workmen who was friendly and sympathetic. He told us of a manhole in the park, down which we could drop into a sewer: along it we could make our way to the station. This idea did not appeal to us very much, nor did another suggestion of a cross-country route of about 50 miles to the nearest town; we decided to go by train, in the most comfortable and quickest way. That there was no German control on the railways was proved by the escape of thirty French prisoners of war, who had calmly taken an early train from Vittel station, and had not been caught. They had departed during the night, and the following morning the Kommandant had found, to his hopelessly fury, that there was nobody to do the "corvées." A detachment of Senegalese was sent from Epinal, and they stayed to work. Some of the internees at first objected strongly to the idea of being in captivity along with negroes, but even the strongest racial prejudices broke down when the men arrived; in their bright red or dark blue caps, and their variegated shirts, they added a touch of colour to the camp. They were like children, very gay, extremely lazy, but willing to do anything we asked them, in return for a piece of chocolate or a cigarette.

It was they who cut the wire, and left us an opening for our escape. Which brings me to another chapter, and to the end of the purgatory of life in Vittel, and a glimpse of the paradise of comparative freedom.

VIII

ESCAPE

For several weeks before I had lain awake at night, turning the question of escape over and over in my mind. Was it too big a risk? What were the chances of getting

safely through the occupied zone? Could we hope to cross the inter-zone boundary without papers? How much help could we hope for in Vichy France, where former friends might have become anti-British and not wish to receive us? If we ever got to Marseilles, what hopes of getting a boat home? Would it be better to try to cross into Switzerland? All these were problems which loomed large in the darkness of the small hours, beside the actual question of getting out of the camp; which bit of the barbed wire to cut; which corner of the camp to get out at; which road to take. In imagination, I got through the wire at least a hundred times, and repeatedly walked the tricky half-mile to the station. Pat and I both half dreaded the moment when the money would come, and we should have to take the plunge. At the same time we could hardly bear to wait, keeping the secret of our going to ourselves, and not letting even our beloved Rebecca know.

Day after day passed, and the money did not come. At last, on November 6th, nearly a month after we had finally settled to go, 1,000 francs arrived, in different money orders, to Pat and me, thereby avoiding the restrictions by which we were only allowed 600 francs apiece.

The hole in the wire was ready, there was nothing more to stop our attempt. During the afternoon we saw our friendly workman, who confirmed the fact that there was no control of papers on the railways. The only suitable train left early in the morning, he said, before the hotel doors were opened, which meant spending the night in the park. We packed what things would go into our small bags, and made our last will and testament, leaving the rest of our property to our room mates. There was one last job to be done before I left the camp; I was responsible for the programme of gramophone records which was to be given the next day; I went down to the Kommandantur with the list to be censored, and argued for half an hour with the officer in charge about the merits of Mendelssohn's violin concerto, which he wanted to strike off the programme. He agreed that it was absurd that a composer should be banned because he was a Jew, and illogical that the German authorities forbade Jewish music when they allowed Russian and Polish music. By way of a protest, I changed the Mendelssohn to Borodin, and he said *Aufwiedersehen*, politely, little suspecting that within forty-eight hours he would be calling for my blood!

Soon after seven in the evening, as it was getting dark, we crept downstairs, and slipped through the doors; I bumped into a member of the patrol on duty. "Good evening, Miss P——," I said. "How cold it is to-night!"

"Yes—don't stay out too long," she answered, knowing my habit of rushing in from the park at the last possible moment before it closed at night.

Pat and I dived into the building where we were to spend the night. It was pitch-dark inside. We groped our way to the corner, hardly daring to breathe for fear of arousing the suspicion of anybody who might come by. We settled down in the corner, and prepared to wait for the morning. If any readers of this book want to know just how it feels to pass the night without moving, in the corner of a cold, completely dark and silent building, they must try it for themselves. It is not within my power to describe the long-drawn-out agony, nor the variety of feelings and thoughts which chase through one's system during those weary hours. I saw our approaching dash for liberty in imagination again and again; through the wire, down the road, sometimes brought back ignominiously between sentries, and paraded before jeering crowds of internees; at other times being shot in the leg; at others, running for it and getting away, but being caught at the next station by guards watching for us. It was no use worrying now, however, and I tried to think of other, more cheerful things; tried to remember poetry; declined German verbs; went over in my head all the Schubert songs I could think of; Pat, how I envied her!—actually got some sleep. She alarmed me by letting out stifled grunts and snores at intervals, and I mercilessly shook her till she stopped.

The night dragged on—two, three, four, five o'clock passed. At five-thirty, we began to feel for our things, and at six a.m. got ready to move out.

It was still dark at six-fifteen, when I pushed open the door and stuck my nose out to smell the surroundings.

No visible sign of a sentry. I moved cautiously forward. A heavy thud resounded just near me, and I started back in alarm. After a moment there was another thud, and a third—just like the tread of a soldier's boot, but no soldier in sight. Then, I saw that lumps of snow were dropping off the branches of the tree opposite, making the false alarm. Gathering courage, we slipped out—five steps to the hole in the wire. Pat lifted the cut strand, I stuck my head down

and went through the gap. Pat followed. We pulled our bags through after us. Still no sentry.

Ten steps to the main road, six across it, and we felt better. We turned down the road and walked past the main gate of the camp, where there were two soldiers on duty. They paid no attention to the two women of Vittel catching the early train. Just after we passed, one got on to his bicycle, and followed us down the road.

My heart went down into my knees as he pedalled up behind us, and I thought "We're done for." But he turned up a side lane, and we went on unmolested to the station.

To get a ticket and cross the line was a matter of a few moments. On the platform, where we had to wait for the train, two women were strolling up and down, talking German. To our horror, we recognised the secretary and girl friend of the Kommandant, both of whom we had met in the office at the camp. We shrank back into the shadows of the station buildings, and muffled up our faces as best we could.

When the train came in, we took the last compartment, as far as possible from the women, and arranged our coiffures as differently as we could. It rather took away from the joy of moving out of Vittel station in a real train towards freedom, to know that the German women were only a few carriages off, and that we should have to disembark at our destination in broad daylight at the same time as they. To our huge relief, when we got off at the station, they went on in the train.

We had another nasty shock when we walked out of the station and into the main street of the small town where we had to spend the hours till the departure of the next train south; standing on the opposite pavement was the old German doctor who had examined us at Besançon! We dived into a shop and stood looking at jewellery and expensive watches which we could not have possibly dreamt of buying, watching out of the corner of our eye till he had safely moved off in a car. After this, and seeing that the town was swarming with Germans in uniform, we decided to keep as far as possible out of the public eye; we spent the afternoon in cafés and churches alternately; the cathedral was an ideal refuge, but so cold that, after consuming some of our provisions (cold potatoes from yesterday's camp lunch, and soldiers' biscuits) in one of its chapels, we were forced back into a less

safe but more comfortable café.

We caught our train on to S—— in the evening. This again was an uncomfortable journey, as no sooner had we installed ourselves in our carriage than two German railway inspectors came in, and sat down heavily exactly opposite us. They eyed us hard, and made remarks to each other, obviously about us, but which I could not catch through the clatter of the train. We were certain they recognised us as enemies, but probably they were quite unsuspecting.

We got the name of a respectable hotel from the guard on the train, and bolted away from the Germans as fast as possible, when we got to the station. To our horror, hardly had we arrived at the hotel when they turned up and we found they had the room next to ours. It needed all the sangfroid we could muster to fill up the hotel forms without giving ourselves away; we wrote our false names with a flourish, putting ourselves down as residents of Nancy, French subjects of the name of Descamps. The proprietress did not ask us to show our papers, mercifully, but took us up to a room. We could not make up our minds whether this was mere inefficiency on her part, or real helpfulness. I am now inclined to think that this was our first experience of the good feeling towards us that so many French people have since then shown; that she recognised our nationality, and set out to help us in this way. As we could not be certain, and as there is an active police which periodically inspects hotel registration forms, and, especially, as two pairs of German jackboots stood at the door next our room, we decided to leave the hotel as early as possible. Although we were both longing for a lie-in the next morning, we made a supreme effort to wake up in time to catch the earliest possible train on to the next town.

We got at last to a place near the line of demarcation between Occupied and Unoccupied France. After a day spent in cafés and churches—here we had the unpleasant experience of entering a place of worship and finding it full of Germans; it was "réservée à la Wehrmacht," we discovered, too late, on a notice on the door—and living on salt sardines and unripe pears, the only food we could buy without coupons, our difficulties came to an end. We found friends who were unbelievably kind, housed us, fed us, clothed us, gave us money and food tickets, disregarding the risk of being imprisoned or even shot if the Germans should find out.

At first we still felt rather like hunted animals. We scrambled into the kitchen every time the bell rang, imagining the Gestapo hot on our trail. But as they never arrived, and as wherever we went we were greeted with friendliness by the people in the town, we gained confidence, and began to feel we were ordinary visitors, in a country of friends and allies. The Germans hardly seemed to count; though there were still plenty of them, many had been sent to the Russian front, and they were shoddy-looking, tired troops who had come back from the Eastern front for a rest, with paper money to spend, buying up the local shops. They were detested, cold-shouldered, insulted, and ignored by the people of the town. The club of "Anciens Combattants," fighters of 1914-18, celebrated Armistice Day in a café in which Germans were sitting. We were so insistently invited to join the party that we could not refuse, in spite of our vows to keep as inconspicuous as possible. We drank with them to the "Entente Cordiale," to "La France Libre," and to "Victory this Year," and listened to their passionate singing of the "Marseillaise."

One old veteran said to me proudly: "You see, Madame, our spirit is not broken yet."

It seemed to me that their spirit is unbreakable.

From this hospitable town we made a trip up to the Swiss frontier, in the hopes of getting across and throwing ourselves on the hospitality of friends in Zurich. We spent a day in the hotel of a sympathetic woman, who kept us shut up in a cupboard for fear of investigations by the local police. While we fought suffocation in our dark sanctuary, she tried in vain to find a guide who would take us across at a reasonable price. The Swiss frontier is policed by three different sets of guards, French, German, and Swiss, armed with rifles, and accompanied by dogs. Very few of the local inhabitants will risk conveying people over into Switzerland, and the only one willing to take us asked 10,000 francs—a sum which was out of the question for us.

We returned to our friends crestfallen, but resigned to the necessity of going into the unoccupied zone, hoping for the best, relying on help from the American Consuls there.

It was arranged that we should be conducted to a village on the edge of the zone, and from there taken across by a "passeur." "Passing" people was a profitable profession in

those parts, and we had no difficulty in finding a boy who knew every inch of the route across to the other side.

We started out after dark, our guide leading the way across some of the roughest country I ever hope to meet on a country walk! Across ploughed fields, where we collected kilos of clay on our feet, through boggy swamps, where the muddy water made a squelching noise which we thought would surely rouse the sentries, through bushes, briars, and brambles, which we could not see, catching at us, tearing our clothes, and covering us with twigs and burrs, we stumbled on and on till we got near the line. "If I hear the sentries, I shall run," said our guide. "Just follow me." We each caught hold of his hand and advanced step by step with thudding hearts, holding our breath.

The pace at which we went forward, and the anxiety about being seen moving, made me feel like a small child playing Grandmother Steps. The whole expedition had the exciting semi-reality of a game. At last we reached the narrow track along which the soldiers bicycle, patrolling the frontier. There was no sign of Germans, and we pushed forward hurriedly to the edge of the river, which was the official frontier. There was no one at the little bridge which leads across into freedom, and we stepped over in delight, and found ourselves in the Zone Libre.

Once across, we could hardly resist letting off a whoop of joy. But the boy put his finger up to warn us that the Germans would not consider us out of their clutches till we were out of rifle range, and we crept on as quietly as ever, until we reached the farm where we were to have a meal before going down to L——, the first village in the unoccupied zone.

A friend of our guide's came with us for the last lap of the journey; they both took bicycles, which they pushed through the fields and lifted over fences. When we came to the main road down to the village, a steady slope of about three miles, Pat and I were each planted on the handlebars of a bicycle, and we hurtled downhill at a terrifying speed, clutching our bags, and pinning our faith to our good luck as we rushed through the night.

We arrived by some miracle safely at the bottom, and stopped at a small inn, where the landlord welcomed us, and led us through an already occupied room to our quarters for the night.

"Take care as you go through the room which leads into yours," he warned us. "The sister of the local gendarme is sleeping there, and if she heard you speaking English she might report you to her brother!"

We had hoped we were in perfect safety, and cursed the gendarme's sister. Still, in spite of the alarming injunctions, and of the exceedingly narrow bed, in which Pat and I fought spasmodically all night for a fair share of the blankets, we went to sleep hugely elated at the thought that we were at last out of the country occupied by the Nazis.

The next day we spent in waiting for friends to fetch us away, as had been arranged by our good friends, to L—, where we were to find the Consul and get some advice. Nobody turned up till the next evening, and we spent a wonderful afternoon climbing the hills behind the town with the energetic and ardently anti-Fascist daughter of our landlord. She was excited at having two English girls to take around, and showed us off to her friends as if we were strange and wonderful animals. "Don't believe it when people tell you that we are not pro-British in this zone," she said. "We are just as badly off for food as the occupied zone, and we know the Germans are taking our supplies, although they are not here in uniform." She said that the division of France into two zones was one of the cleverest moves of the Germans; they were playing on the provincial differences of the North and South of France, and creating a suspicion and mistrust just when France needed unity most. It was very difficult to communicate between the zones; it took months to get a *Laissez Passer*, and even for the most urgent cases it was often impossible to obtain permission; letters and parcels were not allowed; people had often not seen or heard from their relations since the occupation. Men who had left their posts during the occupation found it almost impossible to get back, and their work had been taken over by pro-Germans; this happened often in the case of teachers, doctors, and lawyers.

"I used to go over and visit my friends in S—," said our friend, "but now it's impossible, unless I risk my skin as you did last night!"

The car arrived to take us away, and we left our friends of the hotel, promising to return for winter sports in the district as soon as France was free again!!

Our drive to L— was uneventful; all I remember of it is that the country was dull—the Jura mountains behind

us, and stretches of flat fields and occasional marshes the whole way; that we sang at the top of our voices most of the time; that the car stopped once or twice owing to the poor quality petrol on which she was running; and that we passed a large notice saying "Buvez l'Eau de Vittel. Drink Vittel Water!" At which we made a rude gesture, and thought with sorrow and remorse of our friends condemned to a compulsory cure, while they waited helplessly for the end of the war.

Whatever the life-giving properties of its water, we swore we would never touch a drop of it again; and we offered devout thanks to the providence that had helped us in our escape from Vittel.

"Drink Vittel water? No, thank you. We're going to try Vichy for a change."

IX

UNOCCUPIED FRANCE

It was very strange and very pleasant to find oneself in a town where the walls were clear of anti-British posters and notices signed "Von Stulpnagel," and where there was not a single field-grey uniform to be seen. In spite of this, we found L— strange, and unfriendly; it was the first big town we had been in for two years, and the whirl of traffic, the indifference of the crowds of people in the street, the noise and the dust and the lack of personality in the place struck us as cheerless and unwelcoming.

We spent the afternoon partly in a cinema, seeing a new French film (which was very slow and sentimental compared to the old vivacious and witty ones); and partly snooping round the bookshops, which abound in the centre of the town. The books we should have liked to see were not on show, even in F—, one of the biggest bookshops in France; anything faintly republican or "advanced" is taboo, under the new regulations. The classics are tolerated still, but it is difficult to get new copies even of Voltaire and Diderot; no reprinting is being undertaken as paper and binding materials are so scarce.

We decided that we definitely did not like L—; and when the American Consul advised us to go to Marseilles, and make our arrangements for being repatriated from there, we acted straight away on his recommendation, and took the

evening train south. We found ourselves in a carriage with a conversational young man who had been disembarked from Narvik with the English, sent to Scotland, and thence home to Vichy France. "And I often wish I were back in Scotland," he said.

He was enthusiastic about everything Scottish, from porridge to the girls of Glasgow, and even the climate did not deter him from singing the praises of the land. This was unexpected from an inhabitant of the unoccupied zone, and we were suspicious at first, as we had been warned to be by our friends over the line; but it soon became clear that his pro-British feelings were genuine; and it was the first of many surprises of the same sort.

It was pouring with rain when we got to Marseilles. I had heard a great deal about the town, about the animation of the Cannebière, its famous main street and nerve centre, about the view of Notre Dame de la Garde, about the gaiety of the population. My ideas were completely shattered as I looked down from the station hill at the grey town, through sheets of tropical rain.

The view across to the port was obliterated, the main street was a river, the Marseillais looked anything but gay, braving the elements with umbrellas, or sheltering in the cafés. There was nothing to do but to drop into a bistro, full of unattractive thugs. "What a hateful place!" I said to Pat, who had sung me the praises of Marseilles.

"Wait till the sun comes out," she said. And wait we did, three solid months, time to get to know the town inside out, and acquire something of the "esprit" and the "accent marseillais." The sun did eventually come out, but the wind, an icy *mistral*, effectively counteracted its heat. We were told that this was the coldest winter they had had for years.

Our first preoccupation was to find somewhere to lay our heads that night. We had heard how full the town was, owing to the enormous flocks of refugees from the north—Parisians, Alsatians, Belgians; not to mention Germans, Czechs, Poles, everyone in France who had a hope of emigrating or of finding work. They had poured in after the débâcle of 1940, and Marseilles had to cope with the problem of housing and feeding the influx. As a result it was practically impossible to get a square meal, or find a room at a reasonable price.

We were lucky in being recommended by friends to a small hotel owned by a Madame S—, a Marseillaise born and bred, with an unending flow of conversation, bright orange hair which she periodically retinted, and purple eyelids. Nobody but a Marseillaise could have carried off so much make-up without being branded a "fille de joie." But our hostess was exceedingly respectable, very kind, and an excellent cook. She let out to us the room of a commercial traveller, who was away most of the month, but came back occasionally for a wash and brush-up before leaving again. If he decided to stay for a night or two, we had to turn out, and go to a neighbour of Madame S—'s, a much less eligible establishment.

Here we suffered at the hands of one of the unscrupulous landladies who abound in Marseilles, and profiteer by letting out rooms at high prices to regular customers by night, on condition that they evacuate during the daytime, when the rooms are let by the hour to highly irregular clients. We were always glad to get back to Maison S— after these excursions.

Having fixed up our lodgings, we made our way to the American Consulate, who handed us over to the department looking after British interests; the representative here told us all about the formalities for repatriation—the complicated questions of obtaining visas for getting out of France, into Portugal, and across Spain—sent telegrams off to our families in England, and sent us off to the Police, to be legalised, after our highly irregular journey and arrival.

It was with great fear and trembling that we presented ourselves at the Prefecture. We had to queue up for about an hour and a half in the chilly passage. It was our first experience of French bureaucracy at work. (How often have we queued up since then! If only I could send in a bill to the French police for compensation for time lost and colds acquired while waiting in the unheated passages of the Prefecture, I should be a multi-millionairess.)

We took our turn, after the Poles, Spaniards, Austrians, and Armenians, and at last came into the office. We noticed with dismay the brusque and bullying way in which the police inspectors were handling their inquiries.

If they behaved like this to these harmless people, who through no fault of their own were driven to inhabit Marseilles, how would they treat us, half-enemy aliens, triple

offenders in having escaped from the camp, crossed the boundary illegally, and travelled through France without safe-conduct? We did not realise that we, with the power of our government behind us, and our British passports in our hands, were in a far more favourable position than these unhappy refugees without governments, without passports, living at the mercy of the French authorities. Nor did we realise how far the fact of being women and moderately well dressed would count in the eyes of the officials!

When our turn came we faced the inspector, took a deep breath, and made a clean breast of our story. The shadow of a smile crossed his face as he listened and made notes. Slightly reassured, we told him that we were waiting for visas to be repatriated, and asked him to arrange our permits to stay, and do his best not to let us be sent back to the camp. "Ne vous en faites pas, Mademoiselles—don't worry," he said. "It will be all right. I for one should not want to make difficulties for the English!" Giving us a note to the "bureau d'alimentation," he sent us off with a polite bow, and his best wishes for a pleasant stay in the town.

So that was that. If the police themselves were with us we could count on sympathy from the rest of the population. We soon found that this was true: in every office, in every shop, wherever people behind the counters heard we were English, we were congratulated, consoled with, and plied with questions: "How can I get to England?"—"Is there any way of joining les Français Libres?"—"I have a son (or a brother, or a friend) in England, can you take a message or a letter?"—"When are the British going to land?"—"Tell them when you get home that we are waiting for them here!"

We need not have feared hostile reactions to the blockade. Even in this port, where they suffer more than anywhere from its results, we heard over and over again the opinion that the "blocus" should be tighter. "We know quite well that if food comes into the port it is sent on to Germany."

All Vichy's propaganda had not persuaded them that Britain was responsible for their hunger. For one thing, the Marseillais don't listen to the propaganda: they tune in to the British Home Service rather than to radio Vichy, and they buy the Swiss *Gazette de Lausanne*, and *Journal de Genève* oftener than the Pétainist newspapers.

They can see with their own eyes where the supplies go,

and have sense enough to realise why the food is short.

They know well enough that the official 40 per cent. of French products allowed to the Nazis by the terms of the armistice is unofficially more like 70 per cent.; that whole wagon-loads destined for France are just relabelled at the stations and sent off to Germany. The resentment at this is tremendous. Everything goes, and even the specialities of Marseilles are no longer obtainable in the town. Huge stocks of soap (the celebrated Savon de Marseille) have been requisitioned; oil has disappeared, though the olive crops are just as good as ever; fish, owing to the scarcity of petrol for the fishing boats, is hardly ever seen. While bouillabaisse, the famous dish of the Marseillais, has become a thing of the past, "soupe aux poissons" is a rare luxury, only to be found in the most expensive hotels.

The menu of the average restaurant had become very limited and monotonous, and consisted almost entirely of the vegetable that happened to be in season. How often did we eat this meal during the carrot season: Potage Paysanne (carrots and water); Filet de Boeuf garni (carrots—with a minute scrap of meat); Macedoine de legumes (carrots again); or Carottes Vichy.

Impossible to wash it down with wine, or take away the taste with coffee, even! All one could find in the cafés was "tisane" (lime flower tea—the most insipid of drinks), or café nationale (a mixture of burnt acorns and barley).

There was little spiritual or mental food to be found in Marseilles, no theatres, no lectures, no good concerts. The symphony orchestra under Paul Paray blared out every week with great meridional gusto, but not much technique, a selection of classical music.

We found the opera the best entertainment—but we went not so much for the show as for the public. We went up the never-ending stairs to the gallery—where the walls, by the way, are chalked thick with V's, and Vive de Gaulle—and watched, fascinated, the antics of a fat Marseillaise, who was always there, clapping and waving her arms like a windmill, paid (we were convinced) to encourage the singers, and rouse the audience to equal enthusiasm.

To do the town justice, there was one thing it did not lack: cinemas. If any one of the fifty-odd picture-houses had occasionally shown a good film, we could have forgiven Marseilles a lot. Unfortunately, the best French films are

now on the black list; even faintly satirical and political films are forbidden, and the new ones are all on Vichy lines, boosting in a hardly veiled fashion "La Famille," "Le Sport," and "La Terre." In a sickly and unctuous way, propaganda for the New Europe is poured out, but this sort of soothing syrup merely aggravates the healthy-minded French audiences.

The openly pro-German films were hardly attended, we noticed. The film on French prisoners in Germany was boycotted. The newsreels put out by Vichy but obviously of German origin were greeted with disgusted silence as a rule; but I have heard unflattering comments made in the darkness of the cinema, on the shots of Italian soldiers bringing down British aeroplanes, and of Russian prisoners ("what proof have we that those are Russians?") while photographs of Pétain shaking hands with Goering at St. Florentin called forth a buzz of disapproval.

The films of the Secours National, the palliative which Pétain has provided for the distress in France, are also received without applause. No wonder; there is endless propaganda made for the Secours National, but nobody has ever seen the results of the collections of food and clothing and money which are undertaken with so much energy. Where does it all go? people ask themselves. Some venture the answer that it goes the way of all flesh, fish, and fowl to-day—to the German Reich. There is a story, which I have been assured is true, of a woman who sent a coat to the charity, with a letter in the pocket asking for an acknowledgment from the receiver. She had a polite letter of thanks some time later, written in bad French, from a German living in Munich! Déat went to the pains of denying this story, but nobody was really reassured.

In the meantime, people starve and shiver with cold. Those who can supplement their meagre rations by food from the Black Market manage to live with difficulty; even in the "Marché Noir," it is not easy to find what one wants. "I don't know how the workers live," said a doctor friend. "I earn an average salary, and can manage to get occasional extras in the black market. But how can a workman earning 50 or 60 francs (roughly, six to seven shillings) a day get more than his inadequate half-pound of bread, when a bread card costs nearly 150 francs (17/4). How can he get extra wine, which he badly needs, at 60 francs a bottle, or

oil at 80 francs a litre, or a piece of meat and cheese, at the prohibitive prices of the *marché noir*?"

People everywhere were feeling the pinch, and getting more and more bitter. I could quote hundreds of conversations, all proving the same feeling and reactions, but I will spare the reader this, and instead introduce a few of our friends in Marseilles, who were typical of the majority of people all over Vichy France.

X

FRIENDS IN MARSEILLES

First and foremost of our friends in Marseilles were Jean and Peggy. Jean was dealer in cardboard boxes, a fat, placid Meridional with a shrewd gleam in his eye, which showed that he could be roused to action if need be. Peggy, his wife, was a South African, very attractive, full of vitality and energy, and patriotic to the core.

She and Jean had periodic rows, when they would tear each other's hair, and throw the crockery about, but at bottom they had a sound understanding; their strongest bond was the deep feeling they both had for England. It was rooted in Peggy, with her simple faith in the infallibility of the Empire and its rulers, as it so often is in British subjects from the Dominions, and Jean had acquired it, though perhaps slightly more critically, during a year spent in business in London.

It was their passion for everything British that brought them to be so good to us; when we were first introduced to Jean, we little thought that he would become a foster-father to us, and that we should practically live in his house during our stay in Marseilles. We used to go up to the modern, white, sunny flat, and spend the afternoon listening-in or gossiping with them and their lively *femme de ménage* and Italian maid. Sometimes Peggy would take us to her pet bistros, and introduce us as unusual specimens to the barmen, with whom she was on *tu-toi* terms. Our only fear on these occasions was that Peggy might get too cheerful and begin singing "God Save the King" up the *Cannebière*, or hurling abuse at the cars of the German Commission!

Jean used to tell us how he was playing his part in the anti-German campaign. "I get plenty of orders from the

Boches in Paris," he would say, "but as they are written in German, I never answer them."

I asked him if he were sending off cardboard to Germany. "I'm forced to," he said, with infinite regret. "But last week I had a circular from the Ministry at Vichy, advising us to hold up the truck that was going off. There's sabotage even in high quarters!" He told me of how his friends, also employers in big works, acted in the same way. "B— has a garage. He could sell dozens of trucks to the Nazis. But to avoid doing it he breaks them up and sells spare parts to local firms." He told us how they work in Paris in a glove factory. "They knit the gloves and scarves," said Jean, "in a special way so that when they are put on in Germany they completely unravel . . ." And with a flicker of his fingers he indicated gracefully how the wool would run off the German hands!

We had many other friends; our only regret was that they were of such different types and mentalities that they would not mix, and we had to avoid giving rendezvous where they would have met and had to talk to one another. Peggy would have been utterly out of her element in our other resort, the Foyer des Réfugiés. This was a little club for foreign would-be emigrants, up a side street in the heart of Marseilles. There, one could meet many interesting and different people, studying, working, listening to the radio, reading the periodicals. Most of them were Austrian or German refugees, who had been in concentration camps and managed to get out, and hoped to go to America. When I heard their terrible stories of starvation conditions, and maltreatment at the hands of the brutal and sadistic guards in the French camps, I felt we had escaped very lightly in Besançon and Vittel. There was M—, an ex-Reichstag Deputy, who had been interned at Bordeaux and sent to work first in a dockyard, then in a quarry in the Pyrenees; he had escaped and been able, through friends, to get a visa for South America. But his health—he was a middle-aged, sensitive man—had been irreparably damaged by the heavy unaccustomed labour.

There was L—, who, with his father, an elderly Rabbi, had been in concentration camps in Germany, and fled to France hoping for hospitality, only to be interned again at the camp of Gurs. There was R—, a Palestinian, and therefore a British subject, who came periodically to Marseilles, from the camp at Milles, where 10,000 other would-be

emigrants were waiting to leave, hoping desperately that a ship would be available for them before their visas expired. He had a right to be repatriated to some part of the British Empire, and he begged me to hurry up the British officials in Lisbon, in whose hands lay his fate, and that of his young wife and small daughter.

There was S—, a young Irakian, trained as a doctor in France, practised as a surgeon in Spain during the civil war, author of a book on war surgery, now faced with unemployment and destitution if the authorities in Lisbon did not help to repatriate him to Baghdad, or transport him to England. He was so anxious to play his part in the war, and so highly qualified in practice, that I assured him he would be welcomed by the British Government with open arms!

"If only they will do something before I am forced into a camp!" he said, voicing the feelings of all the unhappy foreigners leading their nightmare, hunted existence in Vichy France.

Among our many friends was Alfred, to whom Pat gave English lessons; we used to go up to his minute attic, almost completely filled by a table and a sewing machine with which he illegally eked out a scanty livelihood. He was a Saxon, with fair hair and an obstinate, ugly, attractive face, a complete anarchist, who had been in five different camps, from all of which he had escaped. Next door lived his friend, Fritz, who had served a six months' sentence in a French prison for renewing his request for a "permis de séjour" at the police station a day late; he was extremely bitter at having had to suffer the indignities and horrors of a French gaol for so slight a lapse. But "it's just part of the system," he would say. Fritz was a Communist; he and Alfred used to argue for hours about politics in pre-Hitler Germany. They would also discuss the present and the future, and would get so heated that I feared they would come to blows. At the moment when Fritz would finally get up exasperated—"You Trotskyites!"—seize his hat, and make for the door, Lotte, his tactful wife, would appear with a pot of tisane and soothe the debaters.

We met a good many anarchists of Alfred's brand in Marseilles: they were mostly disillusioned intellectuals who had come from Paris, and sat congregated in a café on the Vieux Port, playing chess, discussing the possibilities of world revo-

lution, and lamenting over the lack of intellectual life in Marseilles. They seemed to have very little positive to offer in the way of constructive criticism; their conversation usually boiled down to defeatist comments and bitter remarks about Stalin and his supporters.

We were much surprised to find how openly these people discussed politics in the public places in Marseilles; it may have been that, not belonging to an organised anti-German movement, they were not considered dangerous by the police. We, as English woman, took great care to keep out of political discussions, which might have served as an excuse to send us to prison or back to the camp.

In complete contrast to these "leftists" were our acquaintances, the Delins: cousins of my friends in Paris, who were kind to us for the sake of family ties. They were extremely clannish, and ran an old family business of importing spices. Their office was stacked with empty cases which, in better days, had been filled with ginger, cloves, cinnamon, and other exciting things from the Far East. As they were "in alimentation," they had the chance of bartering their stuff for foodstuffs and drinks, and whenever we dropped in to see them and get news of our Paris friends, they would produce aperitifs, and delicious olives and nuts. When we asked if this was a corner of the Black Market, they were most indignant. "Of course not: merely le marché irrégulier!"

Jacques and Michel, the younger sons of the firm, were members of the Legion d'Anciens Combattants; they wore the badge, took the newspaper, and had sworn the oath of allegiance to the Marshal.

They were inclined to be anti-British, owing to the fact that some of their ships had been diverted by ours in the course of the blockade, and from a super-inflated patriotism, which made them resent deeply the incidents of Dakar, and the Syrian war, and imagine English designs on France as a colony! (They did not seem to see that France was already in process of becoming a German colony.)

They were passionately pro-Pétain. "He is playing a double game. He is keeping France on the middle way between Fascism and Communism."

They were frankly terrified of Communism. On coming back from a visit to Paris, "The country is ripe for revolution," they lamented. "Food shortage, curfew at six at

night, everyone in a state of unrest. Thank God for le père Pétain!—he has saved us from all that!"

I ventured the opinion that France might be in a more united and therefore stronger position if she were wholly occupied, but Jacques was not to be shaken in his loyalty to Vichy. I wonder whether they feel as happy about it now that le père Pétain has taken a back seat and handed over effective power to the most discredited German agent in France.

They showed an incomprehensible mentality toward the shooting of the hostages in Paris and Nantes. "Jews and Communists? Who wants them, anyway? Tant pis pour eux!" The callousness of these men made me shudder. It showed how class feeling could embitter and distort the minds of people, kind and decent in their private lives. Michel, an admirable father, a generous friend, and an interesting and amusing person, was through his political outlook capable of condoning an unheard-of outrage committed in cold blood by the Germans against a hundred innocent men.

He belonged to the ranks of those who were the mainstay of the Nazis in France and, unwittingly, one of those responsible for the concentration camps, the suppression of everything progressive, and the persecution of foreigners and refugees in France.

They invited us to celebrate Christmas with them; Jacques was fattening up a pig, which he had christened "Winston," in his garden, so as to have something to eat at the Dejeuner de Noel, though, he told us later, under the restrictions of the present time, Winston was getting thinner instead of fatter every day! As we never felt really at ease with this family, and having a great longing to get out of the town for a bit, we declined the invitation, and instead accepted the hospitality offered us by friends living on a farm near Aix-en-Provence.

The chief difficulty was getting permission to travel; it meant more hours in queues in the draughty halls of the police offices, but eventually we managed to obtain what we wanted, and travelled up to Aix on a crowded train just before Christmas. The Bardin family farm was on an island in the middle of the Rhone, and exposed to the full blast of the *mistral*. The sun of the Midi blazed down, the colours of the Provençal hills and fields enticed us to wander out and explore the countryside, but it was hopeless: if you put your

nose outside the door you risked being knocked down flat by a 90 m.p.h. gale.

We spent most of the holiday indoors, listening to the radio concerts, entertaining the children, and preparing for the great feast of the Reveillon on Christmas Eve.

Friends came from eight miles off, and we sat down twenty to the banqueting table. Nobody would have believed that this was a war-time Christmas in 1942 France: the seven course meal cooked with butter and oil, and accompanied by several sorts of wine, was a thing from the long-forgotten past. "How do you do it?" I asked our hostess.

"We have been collecting the ingredients for the meal for months and months!" she replied. "I couldn't possibly have got the oil or the wine if I had tried to-day."

After the dinner, we had the gramophone and danced, and towards three a.m. the farmer from the neighbouring estate rang up, and asked us to go and join in his celebrations. So the party was transferred by farm lorry across the fields to another farmhouse. There, in a big, high-panelled barn of a room, was a huge gathering of yokels and farm hands from all over the district. The gramophone there was shrieking out Vienna waltzes, to the tune of which they were whirling round, trampling on each other's feet, and collapsing, hot and red-faced, on to benches round the side of the room to drink coffee and eat cakes.

The only disappointment of the evening—and one indirectly due to Hitler—was that Robert, the head of our farm, would not join in the jollifications. He was a cheerful person by nature, and formerly was the life and soul of any local party. But since the restrictions and the worries that had descended on him and his farm, thanks to the war and occupation, he had become morose, moody, and difficult.

"J'ai trop de soucis," he barked, when Ginette, his wife, begged him to join the expedition to the other farm. His cares ranged from lack of potassium to treat his fields, to bad debtors who could not or would not pay; from the dispatch of wine from his vineyards to Germany, to the payment of new taxes that had recently been imposed on his property. Robert was a sceptic regarding most things. He claimed to take no interest in politics, though, like every Frenchman, he had the spirit of criticism in every fibre of his being, and would discuss at great length and with considerable ability the world situation. He had strong prejudices,

according to the way things affected him personally and as a farmer. He was anti-German, seeing his class, the smallish farmer, pushed out by big interests under the Nazi system; he was anti-British, seeing the British as bad farmers. Above all, he was anti-Pétain, as he saw the utter inefficiency of the Minister of Agriculture at Vichy, imposing difficulties on himself. He was anti-Russian because, though he admired their collective farming, he did not fancy it for France. Not having any faith or confidence in the future, he was becoming more depressed and cynical every day, giving his patient wife a trying time. External economic conditions must be responsible for many like him in France, disillusioned and worried; and for many domestic quarrels, unhappy private lives, and broken households.

The Bardin family was not by any means broken up, but the atmosphere was rather tense, and I was glad to get back to our refugees, who, in spite of their penniless state, were cheerful and carefree.

I celebrated New Year with them in a café on the Cannebière.

The news at that moment was good—Wavell was advancing in Libya, and the Russians were beating back Hitler's forces in the East—we were all elated and determined to forget our personal worries and cares, optimistic about the future, and looking forward to the end of the war, and the building of a better world—a world where there would be no more war, no more prisoners, and no more refugees. We drank with great feeling to "Victory in 1942," and to "Reunion in Free Paris!" and everybody kissed everybody else on both cheeks and felt they had made a good beginning to the New Year.

Our visas came through, at last, towards the end of February.

We left Marseilles with a lump in our throats. On the platform were all our friends, refugees and Légionnaires; the Gaulliste and the Communist and the Anarchist had all come to see us off.

"What wouldn't I give to be coming, too!" said Peggy. "I wonder when my turn will be?" remarked Alfred, who had been waiting for months for a visa to leave France. "Let them know what we are thinking here," called out Jean, as the train steamed out, "and come back soon and bring the British Army with you! We're ready."

Looking round our compartment, we found ourselves with a mixed bunch of sailors, soldiers, and a commercial traveller. Having been told how anti-British the French Navy is, we avoided talking. But we soon gathered, from the sailors' conversation, that we had been misled. The toughest of them, a sunburnt, strong-featured man of about thirty, with a row of decorations on his chest, was complaining of the young sailors who were joining the Navy just then. "They are recruited from Fascist-inclined families who have never had anything to do with the sea, and just want quick promotion. They are the only fellows who can be persuaded to join the Navy now that it's under this 'regime pourri.' God knows, I would try and go back home if I could get demobilised; but I live at Brest, the other zone, so they won't let me go."

A young soldier said wistfully: "I have got to spend my leave down here because I can't go back to the occupied zone. I have two months' leave, from Indo-China, and I'm leaving again for two years' service, but they won't let me go home and see my wife and kid. I've never seen the baby yet." We asked him how things were in Indo-China. He replied that the country was practically under Japanese control. "We have a tough time. The Japs don't use Western methods, you know. They think nothing of cutting off a European officer's head. I took care to cut off my officer's stripes before meeting them!" One of the sailors was going to a Camp de Jeunesse, one of the camps organised under the auspices of the Marshal, to replace the former French military service. "Bonne chance!" said the others. "If you like the company, you'll be all right. But these young Fascists who want to run the country get on my nerves. They keep on saying: 'we're going to show you how things ought to be done!'"

We got off the train at X—, a town where we had friends who had been in the university, and were now waiting resignedly for things to improve. One friend, a non-aryan professor of international reputation, had lost his job at the time of the German occupation. He had a bullet wound in the shoulder as a souvenir of his part of the war in 1940, and the only thanks for his pain and his four months in hospital that he had received was the loss of his post and permission to work. Luckily, the university for which he had worked before had given him pupils unofficially, and

were publishing a book of his. Another friend, a well-known left-wing philosopher, lived next door.

We sat round the fire, lit for the first time for months in our honour, and they talked about the situation in France, the past, the present and the obscure future. "This is just a phase," said F—, the optimist. "It's a form of Fascism that was bound to come, following the course of historic events. It will finish with a rising of the people of France, under the leadership of the Free French forces." I asked him what the people thought of de Gaulle, and he answered that, as a military leader, the General commanded great respect and confidence, but was not thought of as a future political leader. "He is, above all, a figure-head and a symbol: a symbol of the united forces of France who stand for progress and freedom. It is most important for us to have this movement, and sink political differences and present a united front against the Nazis—and that is what is happening."

"You're an incorrigible wishful thinker," said V—. "What is happening is that all the best people in France are being thrown into gaol. That doesn't help for a movement to throw off the Boches. While we have 'cette pourriture de Vichy' in control, the clock is set back 200 years. How are we to make the time up?"

The optimist shrugged his shoulders. "It is all to the good that the persecution continues. The morale is splendid in the prisons." He told of how the political prisoners spent their time in discussions, in studying, in singing the Marseillaise, and the Internationale. "The clock may be set back for the moment, but it will leap forward when the time comes, ne vous en faites pas."

What did he think of the Riom trials, we asked. "C'est une rigolade," he said. "A bad farce. The Germans wanted to stage a trial and prove that the French Government was guilty of ruining the nation which would have otherwise been saved by co-operation with Germany. Instead of this, one party guilty of treachery to the interests of France is sitting in judgment on another party, equally or rather less guilty. The Germans will call off the trial when they see what is happening. It is risky to give Blum and Co. a platform at all. The Germans will probably see this, and call it off."

While we were in X— the news came through that the British had landed in Brittany. We were in a café and some-

one came in with this rumour. The evening newspaper was sold out in a few moments. But there was nothing about a landing of the British Army; great disappointment on the faces of the people all round. "We must listen-in to London to-night," said one person. "They naturally would not print much about a British invasion in *that* rag." All over France that evening people must have had their ears glued to their wireless sets, hoping to hear of a landing of the British and Free French forces. It was a disappointment to them that the parachutist raid was on so small a scale; but at the same time it seemed to be an encouraging indication of possible big-scale measures to come.

The Renault raids, which took place shortly after we left, must have been received in the same spirit. Any action undertaken by the British would be welcomed, however small, provided it were effective and directed against the Nazis.

"You are greatly to be envied," said our professor. "You're going to a country which is fighting, resisting actively. Here we sit tied hand and foot, waiting, and doing our bit where we can. But we each of us are potential allies, don't forget!"

As we moved out of the station, towards the Spanish frontier and took our last look at France, and as the customs officials took my *carte d'identité* and tore it up, I was overcome with regret at leaving France.

XI

SPAIN

As we approached the Spanish frontier, I wondered whether there would be any trouble over my papers, and whether I were known to the Franco authorities as a person of republican sympathies.

During the civil war in 1937 I had been to Government Spain, driving an ambulance presented by Scottish miners to the "Frente Popular" for a unit in the south. I had helped in a children's hospital in Murcia for a while, and later gate-crashed Madrid, then in a state of siege, and worked for some time in the press department there.

My short stay in war-time Madrid, with its stimulating atmosphere of enthusiasm, hope and determination, had been an unforgettable experience, and to me, as to all who were

privileged to work with the Republicans, the memory of Spain in her struggle for independence was still a very vivid and precious one.

As we rumbled through the tunnel between Cerbère and Port Bou, I could not help thinking of the last time I had entered Spain by this route. The red, yellow and purple flag of the Republic had hung over the frontier barrier, beside posters saying "No pasaran!" and "Madrid will be the tomb of Fascism."

The militiamen of the people's army, with their brown faces and blue overalls, had examined our papers; seeing our ambulance—inscribed with a message "from the miners of Cambuslang to the Frente Popular" — they had let us go through with the least possible formalities and a friendly "Salud!"

It would be very different now. The whole Spanish scene would be utterly changed. I braced myself for a shock as we emerged from the tunnel and drew up at the station of Port Bou. In spite of all my efforts, I could not help being shaken by the sight of the customs house, with its enormous portraits of Franco, and Jose Antonio de Rivera; next to these was a poster representing a squad of happy peasants with their arms raised in the Fascist salute, shouting in unison "Arriba Espana," while the caption underneath read: Espana, Una, Grande, Libre.

It all seemed quite unreal, and as I looked round the place I felt I was not in Spain at all. It was more like being back-stage in a dress rehearsal of a musical comedy about Ruritania.

The room was full of people standing about or swaggering around in uniforms of the most fantastic kinds, cloaks, braided and bemedalled, hats and caps of curious shape, from the three-cornered black shiny contraptions of the Guardias Civiles, to the flat grey caps with crimson trimmings, strongly reminiscent of glorified German army wear.

The native love of gaudiness and glamour of the Spanish must out, and in order to impress the country, the Army is obviously prepared to compete with the glamour of the bull-ring and the splendour of the Church.

There was a certain irony in the sight of all these picturesque clothes adorning a collection of the most evil-faced thugs I have ever seen in any pirate operetta. I hope I am not misjudging the Guardias Civiles and Spanish officers;

they may have hearts of gold and shining souls beneath their unprepossessing exteriors. But I certainly hoped I should not get on the wrong side of them during our trip.

We had our first glimpse of the One, Great, Free Spain when we found ourselves outside the station, at the top of the stairway which leads down into the little town of Port Bou. The place, which normally numbered about 500 houses, was badly bombed by Italian planes during the last days of the Spanish war. The aviators had tried to hit the railway without much effect, and the civil population of the town had chiefly suffered. The result was that half the houses in each street seem to have been destroyed, and as none of them have been repaired, every street has toothless gaps, creating a depressing impression.

The people in the town looked poor and hungry; several beggars approached us as we went down, and small children with huge black eyes in pinched pale faces sidled up to ask for "una perita, senorita!" The porter of the hotel, a respectable man, who, I imagined, was earning a better wage than most, asked whether we had any bread from France to spare for his infants. The ration was not enough for the family, he explained, and they were always hungry.

All this was very painful, especially as the shops seemed to be full of food; after France, it was staggering to see so much—cakes, fruit, eggs. We were given a very good meal at the hotel, and said to the waiter, "This is much better than what you get in French restaurants." "Ah," he replied, "you eat well in Spain if you can pay." We found to our cost that he was right. The bill for our meal was enormous; obviously we should have to borrow huge sums from our Consul in Barcelona, if we were to eat anything at all on our journey through Spain.

For us, with our Consul at hand, and our favourable rate of exchange, life was difficult enough. But for the Spanish people, we very soon saw, it was impossible. They simply cannot afford anything but the most elementary necessities of life—if those.

We heard on every side the same story, of illness and under-nourishment and even death from lack of food. In our third-class carriage to Barcelona, our companions told us pitiful stories of starvation and want among their friends. One knew of a workman who had fainted from hunger and

fallen off the scaffolding and been killed; another had died on his way to work from sheer starvation.

In Barcelona I found the outside appearance very little changed. Las Ramblas, the main avenue, seemed still very animated, and full of colour, crowded with people, the flower stalls piled high with mimosa, roses, and violets (I couldn't help wondering whether this was meant as a suggestion of the Popular Front Flag). There were some ships in the port, and life seemed pretty normal. One of the staff at the British Consulate told us not to be deceived. "Life is terribly hard. I don't know how the Spanish working classes exist. Sunshine and peanuts are their main articles of diet. They can't afford much else."

He told us that one had to pay 2/- for an egg; fruit, which was an important food in Spain, is prohibitive in price, and bread, the mainstay of Spanish life, is very strictly rationed, and in the Black Market, impossibly expensive.

He showed us the press department of the Consulate, where there were newspapers and war bulletins in English and Spanish on the table, and photographs of the Russian front on the wall. There were a number of Catalans in the room, reading the papers and looking at the pictures with great interest. "They are all for us," said our guide, and his remark was borne out by our own experiences.

We called on a cousin of Pujol's (a Catalan refugee friend of mine in Marseilles), who lived up a dark staircase in a little back street. The family were sitting around a table in an unheated room, drinking coffee. They fell on our necks when we introduced ourselves as friends of Pujol—it was rare that anybody sympathetic to their cause visited them from another country—and they were wild for news. "We listen-in to London," said the daughter of the house, "but we don't get nearly enough news." Letters often do not arrive, or are held up by one of the censorships, and recent first-hand news of friends abroad is greeted with great joy.

Jose had been in prison as a result of his activities in the Spanish republican army, and had since lost his job. He was haggard and worn with hunting for work, but had managed to find a part-time poorly paid occupation. His son was a young architect, who offered to take us round Barcelona and up to the Stadium.

We went by tram to near the city's park, and walked up the road between the exotic sham baroque over-

ornate villas, which would look impossible in any other country, but somehow are not offensive in Spain. Through the gardens where the shrubs were bursting into leaf, and up to the Stadium, where we sat on a terrace, and looked at the view of Barcelona lying below us in a blue haze. "I'd give all this to go to England," said the boy. "Life is impossible here. Culture has been killed. Look at the books, at education, at science. There is nothing." He told us how the church had taken over responsibility for education and even censored the films.

"The only ones I ever go to," he said, "are the ones which the censor says are unsuitable for the young. As for literature, just think, we are only allowed to read 'Don Quixote' in an expurgated edition nowadays!" The Catalan cultural movement, of which Barcelona had been so proud, had been crushed. Officially they were not allowed even to talk the language—which did not prevent it being spoken all over the place, but still.

We caught the evening train to Madrid, sad at what we had seen, but consoling ourselves with the thought that the capital *must* be more cheerful.

What a hope! It was raining when we got there. Perhaps that was partly why it seemed so desperately sad and gloomy. But even when it cleared up, people still looked grey and wan and worried—quite unlike the Madrilenos of pre-war days, or of the crowds, cheerful, confident and determined, of 1937.

It was difficult to find the way about the town: the names of streets have in many cases been changed, the Cibeles to "Avenida Generalísimo Franco," the Gran Via to "Calle Jose Antonio," and so on. The Alcala was almost empty and far less lively than before.

We made our way down to the Puerta del Sol, feeling sadder every moment. Here there were plenty of people, and as the sun came out, we went into a café and asked for some of the "exquisita chocolata" that was recommended—a perfectly exquisite pig-food would have been a better name!—and I could hardly believe it was not the Madrid I had known. But there were no milicianos, no blue "monos" (the Republicans' battledress), no ambulances parked in the middle of the square, no tough International Brigaders, none of the feeling in the air of excitement and effort. Only the harassed-looking men and women, tired-faced soldiers in

brownish uniforms, and the cars of the wealthy, which on closer inspection turned out to be mainly Fiats and Mercedes Benz.

We took one of the yellow trams—one of the few things in Madrid which have not changed—to the outskirts of the town, to see what had become of the University City after three years' "peace."

Little appeared to have changed since the days after the heavy fighting in 1936; the streets had been cleared of the debris which was strewn about at that time, and the telegraph poles set up again. Apart from that, the general appearance of the place was exactly as it had been on the hot day in July, 1937, when I passed the spot and visited the trenches nearby.

Building had been started on a few blocks of new flats to the north, but the big university buildings were untouched, as they had been then. The "Clinico" hospital stood, as it did just after the Asturian miners dynamited it (a week before my last visit), to blow up the tenacious Moors, a gaunt three-walled skeleton, the ruins of 80 million pesetas—against the blue distance and transparent amethyst silhouette of the sierra.

In the garden of the Casa de la Filosofia, a boy in overalls was working. We spoke to him and he told us he had just got the job, after being released from two years' prison for republican sympathies.

He had fought in the trenches on this front during the war. "I probably met you here," I said. "Let's hope next time we meet it will be a happier time for Spain."

From the garden we walked across the "park"—a scene of desolation where the trenches had been. I remembered those trenches well: they had been a sort of underground university, each section having its dug-out class room, with a blackboard and benches taken from the school buildings, and being named after one of the war heroes: Casa Modesto, Villa Pasionaria, Hotel Negrin. . . . In one they had given me a recital on a guitar, and a meal of fried sparrows, between spasmodic firing at the Moors entrenched opposite. Now all that was left of Villa Pasionaria and the others was mounds of earth and gravel, over which children played and stray dogs searched for garbage.

We went on to the "Clinico," where we were confronted by three soldiers, one of them a guard in a thick grey cape,

sitting on a heap of rubble with a rifle by his side. He asked what we wanted, and we said we had come to admire the view. On hearing our foreign accents, he asked if we were Germans, which we indignantly denied. "That's an insult to an Inglesa!" On hearing this, he pricked up his ears, rolled us a cigarette each, and, handing it over solemnly to be licked and stuck down, he asked: "Why don't you English allow us to have wheat?" We replied that anybody with any sense knew that the Spanish "trigo" all went off to Germany. Did he want to send presents of food to Germany? Did he like Germany so much?

He spat vigorously. "Alemania no, Inglaterra tampoco." (Neither England nor Germany.) "Espana por los Espanoles." We asked him if he liked the New Spain. "Not yet," he replied. "What we need is the King. When we have 'el re,' everything will be all right."

He seemed to have little faith in Franco or the Falange. This we found a fairly general feeling, later. After another cigarette, he showed us the subterranean passages which the Moors in the Clinico had used for communications during the civil war. "I was here," he said boastfully, "in an important post." I kept my doubts about this to myself, as his chief object seemed to be to impress us with a sense of his importance. Leaving him, in spite of his efforts to persuade us to stay and go to a cinema with him later, we walked back towards the town. The other soldier got up and followed us. I was rather nervous, and suspected that he might be trying to gain promotion by reporting us as spies or undesirable aliens, tried to shake him off. But it turned out that he was genuinely friendly and liked the British since his experiences in Gibraltar, where he had been working for several months on fortifications, well paid and entitled to the privilege of white bread—a great rarity in Spain.

The only slightly hostile person we met during our stay in Madrid was a lieutenant in the army, who told us that Gibraltar was a thorn in the side of all Spaniards. "When the question of Gibraltar is settled," he said, his eyes gleaming with animosity, "then we shall be friends with the British." I believe he was very exceptional. Most people in Spain do not care two pins about the Rock, and are honestly and completely for us, and against the Germans.

The expensive and widely-distributed propaganda of the Nazis has little effect; the exhibition which was showing in

the Alcala, the "soldado aleman en el frente de l'este," was opened while we were in Madrid. I heard the slightly cynical comments of a Spaniard looking at the paintings of German soldiers crouching in frozen trenches, and struggling through snowdrifts.

"They don't look very comfortable," and "Is that really where they want us to go to?"

The cinemas are all German-controlled, as we found to our cost when we dropped in one evening to the little picture house near our hotel, where a newsreel of the most blatant Nazi type was showing: a military parade, goose-stepping, banners with swastikas, the Luftwaffe and all complete. It was followed by an anti-British melodrama, dubbed in Spanish, but obviously made in Germany.

The story dealt with the machinations of a villainous Englishman, who was trying to swindle the honest Spaniard out of a rubber plantation, and seduce his wife, and was exposed in the end by the heroine, and very properly punished for his crimes.

The Spaniards who took us to see it were much upset, and apologetic about the choice, but admitted that there is very little other than German propaganda to be seen. They swore that neither they nor any other decent Madrilenos were in the least influenced or impressed, but on the contrary disliked this sort of thing.

On Sunday we queued up early in the morning for a train to Toledo.

There were a lot of peasant women waiting in the station, and we saw an example of the brutality of the Guardias Civiles, who came along and, wanting to clear a passage, began beating about them with their truncheons, hitting the women, who drew back, grumbling and abusing the thugs. We managed at last to get on to the crowded train—all trains are overfull these days, owing to the shortage of coal, and the damage to rolling stock—and travelled squashed in with soldiers and peasants to Toledo. We spent the day wandering about the town, sight-seeing a l'Americaine. We "did" everything: the house of El Greco, with its astonishing paintings, with its tiled courtyard, and its garden full of roses and lavender; the monastery on the hill; and the church of San Tomas; and the unbelievably splendid cathedral, with its carved stalls, and superb tombs and monuments, and its stained glass windows, and its sanctuary where some

of the best Grecos in the world can be seen, but through a regrettable semi-obscurity; and the treasury with its fabulous collection of robes encrusted with gold, and embroidered with coral and pearls. It all brought vividly home to us the immense richness of the Spanish Church. The sacristan who showed us round said that the treasures had not suffered any damage nor been lost during the civil war. The Republicans had taken great care of the things, had buried them underground, and not stolen anything.

He was very unhappy about the state of Spain; there was so much misery, so much cruelty, so much intrigue. Even in Toledo there were spies, and people denouncing one another. "Una tragedia, senorita," he said. We agreed, and felt wholeheartedly the extent of the "tragedia" as we came down past the ruins of the finest Moorish building in Spain, the Alcazar, now a gigantic heap of rubble, glass, tiles, stones, bricks and earth. We were horrified to see that nothing had been done since 1936 to clear the debris, or to make it safe for the people: walls still stand, looking as though they would topple at any moment, and great iron girders stick out into space, a constant menace to the people living below, and to the children who play among the remains. I have been told that Franco keeps the ruins as they are, as a memorial and a reminder of the defence of the Alcazar. It seemed to me more likely that this was a good excuse for not spending money on repairs.

On the way back we talked to a man in the train who had recently come back from his "labour service," in a work company on the frontier of Gibraltar; they worked, he said, 16 hours a day on the fortification (against Gibraltar), with a guard behind them, who beat them if they stopped to rest for a minute.

All this seemed to me typical of Spain to-day. There is no money for clearing away ruins, no money for saving the children, none for reconstruction. There is only money for military purposes and for Hitler's propaganda.

A friend called round to take us to a night club, where we saw one side of Madrid life which we had not expected. The "boite de nuit" was full, and people seemed to be spending money like water.

"Most of the clientele here are Germans," we were told. "They can still live well and enjoy themselves, while the rest of Spain starves."

XII

PORTUGAL

We had heard so much about Portugal, the land of plenty, and Lisbon the golden with milk and honey blest, that I ought no doubt to have been delighted at the prospect of arriving there in a few hours' time. But, as a matter of fact, my heart was so firmly rooted in Madrid that it was like being torn in half to be carried off in the Portuguese express on the night of March 7th.

We had not seen the last of Spain even when we steamed out of Madrid. There was in our compartment a good collection of Spanish people, who made themselves as comfortable as possible on the hard wooden seats, and proceeded to sing all the songs they could think of. As the average Spanish repertory is very comprehensive, and as when they like a tune they go on and on, inventing verses if necessary, we did not lack musical entertainment. I asked them to sing some flamenco, and one boy pitched up and wailed the strange heart-rending songs with an accompaniment, failing a guitar, of tapping and drumming of feet, and clappings and Ole's from the rest of the carriage. They were astonished to hear that I liked flamenco—an unusual taste for a foreigner—and that I knew a good many of the songs they were singing.

We were sorry when the musical party moved out and left us alone with our first Portuguese acquaintance, a fat man with a bloated face and one eye. The other he had lost during the Spanish war, in which, he told us, he had fought as a volunteer with the Viriatos on Franco's side. "They offered me 10,000 pesetas a month," said he. "So I joined up. Why not? It was good business." He held forth at great length on the greatness of Portugal. "It's the best country in the world for eating and drinking just now!" He himself was a good advertisement for the prosperity of Portugal, if being well fed is the criterion. We hoped, however, that he was not typical of all his compatriots.

We reached the Portuguese frontier the next day, and had to go through the tedious business of examination of papers, money, clothes; we were searched by a woman, who pushed and pulled us and patted and prodded us, but happily for us did not trouble to strip us; this practice had been dropped since it was found that the Portuguese male officials

could not be trusted not to spy on the proceedings.

We were met at the station by a tall Scot, who we had been told to look out for by the Consul in Madrid, who looked after us and put us on the next train. (Our arrivals and departures throughout our journey of repatriation were arranged for us as on a personally conducted Cook's tour. I can't say I like the removal of all independence and initiative in this sort of travelling, but it was certainly very well planned.) From the window, going through the country of Portugal is exactly as one imagines it. Rolling grey fields of olive trees and cork trees. Small picturesque villages where swarthy peasants, with strong and striking features, go about barefooted. Groups of muleteers, wearing long black caps with tassels, or big black sombreros reminiscent of a South American film, their breasts covered with bright striped mulecloths. The people are extremely picturesque; even the police have evolved a uniform quite unprecedented, of bright blue serge, with blue cylinders on their heads like top hats minus the brims.

Wherever we went we were struck by the colour and theatrical appearance of the place. Lisbon, with its twisty, hilly streets, its barefooted women who walk about the town balancing huge baskets of fruit or fish on their heads, and wearing red, green and orange scarves, is a paradise for the painter; Rebecca would have been in ecstasies.

It is, or was, also a paradise for the gourmet, though we wondered how long it can keep its reputation, well deserved as it was then, in a world stricken by war.

It was certainly just then the one place in Europe where luxury goods abounded. To see shop windows full of cream buns, shoe-shops full of leather boots and hand-made shoes, and chemists showing lipsticks and face-creams, seemed to us hardly possible. But so it was, and we were not surprised to hear that large numbers of people linger on in Lisbon, instead of hurrying back to coupon country!

To do ourselves justice, we did not try to linger on; somehow we did not feel inclined; there was too much of everything in Lisbon, and it took away one's appetite for cream cakes, to think of people in Spain, in France, who had not even enough bread.

We tried desperately to do something for our friends left behind in Marseilles, before leaving Europe, and sent off some parcels of prunes, and tins of sardines—the only food-

stuffs that the Portuguese would allow to be exported—hoping that they would arrive safely and not be devoured en route by the officials at the Spanish or French frontiers.

We delivered several letters on behalf of refugees in the Relief Organisation bureaux in Lisbon, and I made inquiries at the British repatriation office about the possibilities of some friends of ours coming to England. "It's no good his trying to come," said an efficient secretary in the administration, in answer to my questions on behalf of R—, the Palestinian, and of L—, of Irak. "These foreigners would not fit into the organisation of the country. They should try and go back to their own countries."

"How can a man get back to England or to Palestine these days?" I asked. "They are British subjects, and surely we are responsible for them up to a point." But she held out no encouragement.

I thought of R—, living in a desperate plight, liable to be snatched back into the worst of the French camps by the ever-vigilant French police; and of L—, with his skilled hands and his long experience of war surgery, longing to be useful to the Allies but, if unable to leave, faced with the prospect of labour service on French fortifications, directly working for the Germans. "I think it's short-sighted to waste such good people," I said. "Please try and do something for them." But it was obvious that this girl was only part of a machine, and could not do more than fulfil her orders, could not exercise imagination, or dispense help in the case of individuals, however badly they needed it.

The British abroad too often seem to lack imagination, and this applies in their attitude towards the country they are in. They are most of them charming and cultured people, working in Embassy and Consular offices, but seem hardly aware that there are others besides them in the country, never trying to get in touch with the real people around them.

A conversation with various Portuguese confirmed this opinion. We used to talk to a sailor on leave who haunted the café near our *pension*, and told us what he thought of the world, the war, and the British in particular. "Why don't you make more effort to get to know the Portuguese?" he said. "The Germans are working ten times as hard as you at making propaganda. There are five newspapers controlled by them, and they have spies and agents in every big firm. The people here want to know more, they are all

for Britain and her Allies; but they hear little but the German side of things." He went on to talk about Salazar. "He is a dictator like Franco and Mussolini; he uses the same methods to prevent us saying our minds. The prisons are full of people who have dared criticise the Government, and you can be shut up for sending a parcel of food to a prisoner." He made it clear that Salazar's régime was not popular among the Portuguese people.

Our five days in Lisbon went very fast; we were living in a small and modest *pension*, which had the advantage of being central and giving good meals at a very low price. We did not feel happy at the cheapness, as we heard that the servants were hardly paid a living wage. That, it seems, is usual in Lisbon, but it did not make us any easier.

The kitchen boy of the hotel was a Spaniard from Galicia; on hearing he was a member of a Galician Club in Lisbon, I thought that it might be possible to hear some songs from Northern Spain, and asked the boy if strangers were allowed to visit the club.

He immediately invited us to go to one of the Sunday evening dances, and obviously was thrilled at the thought of introducing two Inglesas to his friends. However, when the time came, he was obliged to stay and work in the kitchen, and sent us off with another boy instead. To my great disappointment, I found that the Galicians were a most sophisticated crowd, very smartly dressed young nuts, with well-oiled hair and pointed shoes, and that their concerts consisted of "Swing" in the best American tradition, with nothing Spanish about it. They were very non-political — possibly from caution—and seemed to be living in Portugal from choice rather than necessity. Republican refugees, it appears, have all been rounded up by Salazar, and sent to camps, or else back to Spain.

As usual, we moved from one end of the social scale to the opposite extreme, and the next day our outing was with a distinguished person who had recently come out from England on important business for our Government. He was engaged in improving relations with the Portuguese, and tried to see the best in their régime. As he swept us off in a grand car, up to the best hotel in Lisbon for lunch, he pointed out the great town-planning activities of Salazar, the modern flats, the Avenida de la Liberdade, the widest avenue in

Europe, so they say, which the dictator is going to extend right out into the suburbs.

Our host motored us out to the great monastery outside the town, and pointed out the influences of the 15th century explorers on the architecture; he took us over the fort which guarded the entrance to the city, a splendid example of medieval military construction; he told us all about the Kings and Infantas of Portugal, and their intrigues and quarrels with Popes and Emperors. We felt as though we had had a course on the culture and civilisation of the Portugal of yesterday, to balance our impressions of the lack of culture and the questionable civilisation of the Portugal of to-day.

My chief regret was that I could only talk with difficulty to the people; I could only converse in a garbled Portuguese, on the lines recommended by a friend, who had said "Portuguese is like Spanish spoken by a Cockney with a cold." And there was not time to try. I resented bitterly the hours spent in Consular offices and in the travel bureaux, where we had to fill up endless forms and declarations about our journey back. The minutes in Lisbon were precious, as they were our last minutes in Europe, on the poor persecuted old continent, with its friendly populations trampled and crushed and gagged, which we were leaving, with an ache of regret, for we did not know how long.

XIII

HOME AGAIN

At midnight on March 10th we left the waiting-room of the airport at Cintra to walk across the flying field to our aeroplane. It was a dark night and we had only starlight to show us the way; it was like walking in a dream to feel our way across the river, which gleamed and whirled under the narrow bridge, and arrive at the black bulk of the *Clipper*.

As we climbed in our minds were full of half-anxious curiosity. We were really on the way back, after two years away from home. How would it be? What would have changed? Would our friends have grown white and old during the bombardments? Would London be recognisable? Would the children be starved and ill? We asked ourselves these and a hundred other questions, and faced the thought of the answers with some trepidation.

The plane, like a flying palace, taxied along and took off northwards. To my infinite sorrow, we were blacked out, and could only just see, through a minute chink in the curtain, the last of Lisbon, a faint twinkle of distant lights.

In our luxurious grey velvet-padded prison, without jolting or vibration, we rose and, hardly conscious of moving, rushed through the air towards home. Six hours later we were in Ireland.

The blinds were drawn up, and we could see the green fields and grey houses of an utterly different country swinging up at us as we came down aslant, the pressure of the air deafening and causing us considerable pain. All the journey was not made with the lightning speed of the first part; in Eire we had to get out, as our plane was taken off, and we were left to sit in a remote Irish village, looking at the mist and possessing our souls in patience till a seaplane arrived to take us on.

We had a brief glimpse of Eire—my first. The country did not appear to be much affected by the war. Butter, cheese, honey, bacon were not rationed; tweeds, woollens, stockings, to be had without coupons, abounded. The Irish shopkeepers were friendly, and confided that everybody hoped they would not have to go to war. Though, to be sure, they didn't like the Germans any more than we did!

The Irish language, we noticed, was not spoken, though I read in the local paper that on St. Patrick's Day everybody was expected to buy Irish, think Irish, and speak Irish. As we would have left (it was to be hoped) by March 17th, this did not affect us; but I wondered how many inhabitants of the village of A—were tongue-tied that day through patriotic abstention from speaking English.

We should have been thoroughly bored at our enforced stay at A— if we had not been stuck there with an interesting company of people. We spent the time eating, going for long walks through the mist, reading, and playing chess. Everybody was frankly delighted when the officer told us to collect our luggage and get into the bus, which took us to the coastal village, whence the seaplane left at last for England.

It was a two hours' journey. We came down with blinds drawn, and found ourselves on our native soil. Our trials were not yet ended; we were herded into the customs office, to have our luggage, papers and persons examined and approved.

It was not till our release from the Customs, six hours later, that we felt ourselves genuinely back in England.

It was then that our series of shocks began—shocks at finding unexpected changes, or lack of changes, in England after two years abroad.

The first shock was the Black-out, complete and utter, after the lights of the Continent. I had forgotten how dark darkness could be, after the illuminations of Lisbon, the brightness of Barcelona and Marseilles streets, and the semi-clarity of "camouflage" in Occupied France.

The second great shock I had was on arrival at the hotel where we had to stay the night (having missed the London train), where we saw, to the strains of a jazz band, British officers jogging round, with expressions of the utmost boredom on their faces, clasping equally bored-looking girls in unfamiliar and uncouth uniforms. Could this be England at war? My second impression of the Army was, happily, more reassuring, that of Tommies on the train, who looked at least as if they were getting somewhere, even if it were not to the Second Front!

We had our third shock when we got to London, and met our friends and relations, none of them changed in the slightest degree, despite their harrowing experiences of fire and bombardment in the last two years. Following on this came the worst shock, when, driving through London's devastated areas, we saw for the first time the damage done by the Blitz. Madrid and Toledo had seemed bad enough: there had been nothing there to compare with this; the only thing was that while in Madrid no attempt had been made at clearance, London seemed to have removed its debris most efficiently. But I couldn't get over that shock of the wide open spaces in the City, and it will be a long time before I do.

Other minor surprises followed. Shop windows displaying woollen clothes, leather shoes, cigarettes, jam, rubber boots and waterproofs, all sorts of things that had disappeared long ago in France, and I had thought, also in England. Bookshops, full of books that would have been burnt in German-occupied France, and banned by Vichy and Franco.

Striking posters calling for support for Russia. (It had

been Finland when I left in 1940.) Huge photographs of Churchill, Stalin and General de Gaulle, instead of Pétain and Franco.

On the psychological side there were many surprises, too. The enthusiasm and awakening of people in some circles, the apathy and complacency in others.

Most of all I was struck and shocked by the lack of understanding and ignorance about the Continent, especially about France.

People have asked me continually: "What is happening in France?" "Does Vichy really represent the people there?" "Have the French become Fascist?"

I set out to try to answer a few of these questions in this book, and to convey through the story of my adventures and my personal impressions, a slight idea of the feelings and reactions of the French people, as I saw them; if I have succeeded in the very smallest degree in doing this, and in furthering an understanding of these suffering but magnificent people, I shall feel that I have not wasted my time nor yours; and that I have paid a minute part of my debt to France, and our friends, the French people.

EPILOGUE

WITH FIGHTING FRANCE

It was with slight trepidation that we presented ourselves, soon after getting back to London, at the door of de Gaulle's Headquarters.

Number four Carlton Gardens is an imposing Mayfair mansion, which was (so a handsome plaque announces) from 1764 to 1785 the residence of Lord Palmerston; since 1940 it has been the home of the Fighting French movement. The tri-colour flag flies over the roof, and the Croix de Lorraine decorates the door, at which a "poilu" of the French Army stands with fixed bayonet.

The atmosphere of France here struck us so forcibly that we soon got over our shyness in the pleasure of hearing French spoken all round, and in the feeling of being back in the country for a brief space of time.

Once past the outer guard, a conscientious soldier asked for passes; another, at a desk inside, made out the necessary papers for the department wanted. It is no easy matter to

get access to the high-ups in Carlton Gardens. But once through the formalities, we found a cordial welcome from the celebrities we had come to see, the "Porte-parole de la France Combattante" of radio fame, and Monsieur B—, head of the press department. We were intrigued to see what the "Porte-parole" was really like: after hearing the speculations of devotees of the B.B.C. in France, it was something of a shock not to find the fat cheery figure that French listeners imagine from his voice, nor the swarthy, sinister, heavy Jew portrayed in the pro-Nazi French papers, but a very tall, stooping, curly-haired soldier, with the intense face of a medieval monk.

Everyone listened intently to our news from France, and scrutinised the "Gaulloise bleue" cigarette with a message in code screwed up inside—I had conveyed this with fear and trembling through Spain and Portugal; it had nearly got smoked by mistake on several occasions, was more than slightly soiled, but legible none the less. I was thankful to hand it over to "Porte-parole," who promised to broadcast the answer needed to the code-message.

It seemed that it was unusual for Englishwomen to arrive from France after so few days' delay, and our stories were fairly hot news. We were plunged right away into a whirl of press interviews, lectures and broadcasts; the misery of being interviewed was leavened by the fun of broadcasting—especially to our friends in France (in spite of having our execrable French accents recorded back to us). When months later, we learnt that the broadcast had been picked up in Vittel, and had got round to the camp, I got a considerable kick out of imagining the reactions of our friends, and the irritation and exasperation of our enemies at hearing we had got home again.

In May I had the luck to get a job at Fighting French Headquarters—a job which has kept me as closely in touch with France as I ever dared hope to be: surrounded by French in the office, with the right to belong to a French club and canteen, and with the work of reading and summarising the latest newspapers and reports arriving from France.

Following the newspapers was at times intensely interesting, at others deeply depressing. However glad one was to know what was happening inside France, it was grim to see conditions there going from bad to worse. Laval's return to power brought an avalanche of bad news: the introduction

of ferocious anti-Jewish measures in both zones, the intensification of persecution of political suspects, the creation of the fascist "militia," the increase of mobilisation of manpower for Germany.

It was very painful to read about the anti-Jewish measures and hardly seemed credible that such things could happen in France. It made me almost ill to think of friends like B—— and C——, French to the core although not "aryans," forbidden to go into the main boulevards of their beloved Paris, not allowed to shop, or to enter parks, cinemas, even public telephone boxes! and forced to wear huge yellow stars on their coats branding them as Jews and "undesirables." The only consolation was to know that people in Paris were standing by them, showing sympathy by themselves flaunting yellow stars, designing clothes and pictures with yellow stars, till notices went out from German headquarters that "anybody who is not a Jew found wearing a yellow star will be sent to a concentration camp."

When the atrocious measures were introduced which sent not only foreign but French Jews to labour camps, dividing families, separating mothers from children, causing misery and suicide in countless cases, it was a slight comfort to read of the protests of Archbishops and Cardinals in France, and of the help given by Catholics and Protestants alike to the persecuted people. One Vichy newspaper voiced loud indignation because "every Catholic family now is proud of having its refugee Jew."

And as a result of almost universal condemnation among church circles, the measures were toned down somewhat in the unoccupied zone.

But it doesn't make it any better for the friends whom we know have disappeared — for Rebecca's father, for instance, who has been deported, while her mother, almost mad with grief, and her little sister are separated, in concentration camps somewhere in occupied France—typical of hundreds of thousands of victims of Nazi oppression, and of the treason of Laval and his supporters.

Soon after Laval's return to power came the measures for conscription of French workmen for Germany. We had seen posters up on the walls of Besançon and Epinal, appealing for volunteers for German factories and describing the idyllic conditions reigning there. But this was different—this big-scale campaign for deporting French man-power and

industrial technique to Germany—ruining France's industry, and dispersing her most active and "resistant" workers. The campaign started with talk about the "relève"—an exchange of prisoners for specialised workers. Hitler promised to release one prisoner of war for every three skilled men sent. "Oh, yeah?" was the attitude of the French, who had no special reason to believe Hitler's promises. Appeals and persuasion gave way to bullying, bullying became threats, the campaign raged in press, radio and through official spokesmen, but no volunteers came in. When, at the end of August 1942, there were only 30,000 out of the half-million men demanded, Laval introduced partial conscription, which roused tremendous protests, strikes and demonstrations. Partial conscription proved futile. By November, Laval had turned to universal mobilisation.

And as I write (Autumn, 1943), a tremendous man-hunt, unlike anything in history, is raging throughout the country. The Nazi's Gestapo and the Vichy police are chasing the men of France, arresting them in the streets, in their homes, at the factory gates, even in cafés and cinemas, and are sending them off like cattle, in trucks and trains, to Hitler's war factories.

Tragic stories come in daily to the Fighting French Headquarters: tales of men being arrested, manacled and shot if they resist the police; tales, too, of magnificent resistance under great difficulties; of women lying down on the rails in front of the engines of the trains to prevent them leaving, of men jumping through the windows, and escaping to join the "partisans," the guerilla bands in the hills. It is these stories which make work in Fighting France so stimulating and exciting, and renews every day one's faith in the French people.

Most exciting of all is to hear the stories of men and women who have risked their lives to come across to England to join de Gaulle.

Every day there are new arrivals, people of all kinds, classes and opinions, from Catholics like Mme. C——, who walked over the Pyrenees with three small children, spurred on by her faith, to Communists and Socialists bringing over messages of support from the workers' organisations in France.

I have been lucky enough to meet some of them: the Socialist Deputies, Bloch, and Gouin who defended Blum at Riom; Fernand Grenier, Communist Deputy, imprisoned for months as a hostage; Poinboeuf, leader of the Christian

Trade Unionists; Morandat, of the Lyons Gaullist committee; and many more, with breath-taking stories of underground resistance work.

At supper with Morandat in the "Petit Club," the tiny restaurant crowded with Frenchmen, off Piccadilly, I heard about the strikes in Lyons against Laval's conscription. "Our committee hadn't dared to take the responsibility of calling the men out," said Morandat, "but we were overjoyed when we heard that all the big works in the district had come out spontaneously and were holding meetings of protest against the notices calling-up workers for Germany. It was a victory for us that day; for though 400 out of thousands of strikers were arrested, they were nearly all released the next day, and the notices came down."

The story of the strike, and the predictions of how, on the great day of the Allied landing a general strike would be called all over France, was interrupted by the 9 o'clock news. The announcer gave out the scuttling of the French Fleet at Toulon. The members of the "Petit Club" listened with white, tense faces. Few English people realise what the sacrifice meant to the French in London, and must have meant to them in France. When the Marseillaise was played we all stood up. Morandat's eyes were brimming over. He had been through plenty of suffering and danger without flinching, and yet this news was too much for him. "It is the only honourable thing that could happen—but it's *épouvantable*," he said, and added bitterly: "Darlan is to blame for this. Why didn't he call the Fleet over earlier—the traitor!"

The "affaire Darlan" left many Frenchmen wondering. The news of the Allied landing in North Africa in November was welcomed with tremendous enthusiasm in our headquarters. We all started arranging imaginary offices in the finest apartments in Algiers, and choosing which cafés and hotels to patronise; but we soon found this was premature. Surprise at the delay in calling de Gaulle to Africa soon turned to dismay at the choice of rulers—however temporary—and at the sight of so many Vichy supporters being left in high places.

After the landing there were many new arrivals in London at the "Welcome Centre" in Kensington, where men are housed after their journeys to join de Gaulle, across mountains and oceans, through prisons and concentration camps. I met and talked to many puzzled, rather bitter, fervently

patriotic young men, who had worked in the cause of "Gaullism" and, as they thought, of the Allies, in Africa for two years, only to find themselves in danger of arrest by the hostile Vichy authorities kept on by the Allies.

One boy of about 22 described how he had been forced to leave his home in Algiers by jumping out of the back window, when the police came to track him down on a charge of desertion from the army: this because he had left his Vichy regiment, and joined a secret group organising the reception of the Americans. He described in vivid detail the night he had spent on the shore, "hiding in bushes to avoid the African coast patrols, waiting for the boats to arrive." His eyes shining, he told of the approaching landing barges appearing through the half light: "For a moment I thought they were Germans; they wore the same shaped helmets, and when I gave the password 'Whisky!' I could have sworn they answered 'Ja!'" (How could he know that *Oui*, or Yes, in Yankee is commonly *Yeah*?).

Another Gaullist told me that he was one of the 200 men who had captured Darlan on his arrival in Algiers. "Can you imagine how we felt when the Americans released him and made him High Commander over us?"

Many reports described the confusion and distress caused by these events in France. We heard how people who had celebrated the North African landing with their last bottle of champagne—saved up for the day of liberation—began to regret it when they heard that Vichy law still reigned in Africa.

Everyone wondered why de Gaulle was not in authority there. And when, after weary weeks of waiting and wondering, he did arrive, and later the National Committee of Liberation was formed, the news was greeted with undisguised joy—as all reports, even those of the Vichy radio and the Nazi press admitted.

For anybody who has been in France since the German occupation and seen the "Vive de Gaulle" chalkings on the walls, the "Croix de Lorraine" on the doors, and heard conversations of ordinary people everywhere, there is no doubt at all that General de Gaulle represents for the enormous majority a symbol of resistance, and that it is through his name that the movement of resistance has been held together and gone forward to the unity which reigns to-day. There is no doubt that all classes and creeds have agreed to

work under the banner of Fighting France, until the Boche is thrown out of the country. What happens after that is for them to decide, and for anyone outside to try to impose a leader or form of government on the French people would lead to disaster.

There is a tendency to cry down the General here. "He is so difficult — "so ambitious," and so on. I don't know if this is true: men and women I have worked with who do know him personally, and whose judgments I would trust, have indignantly denied the accusations of his critics. "Perhaps he is not easy," they say; "he is certainly not willing to surrender any of France's rightful claims. Naturally he is more difficult than someone of less stern calibre; he has high principles, which he follows through, regardless of anyone's feelings."

In any case, personal ^{feelings} was in are not important. The essential thing is that French unity, achieved at such sacrifice and such length, should not be undermined or destroyed. With the recognition of the National Liberation Committee by the Allies, the French people see a guarantee of their sovereignty and independence. They feel that their fight to win this unity has been justified. And if this results in the building of a new France, where Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are not mere words, and where war, tyranny, and injustice are things of the past, then the sufferings of all our French friends, the dozens we know, the thousands we shall never meet, but who are helping us secretly and heroically still to-day, will not have been in vain.

THE END